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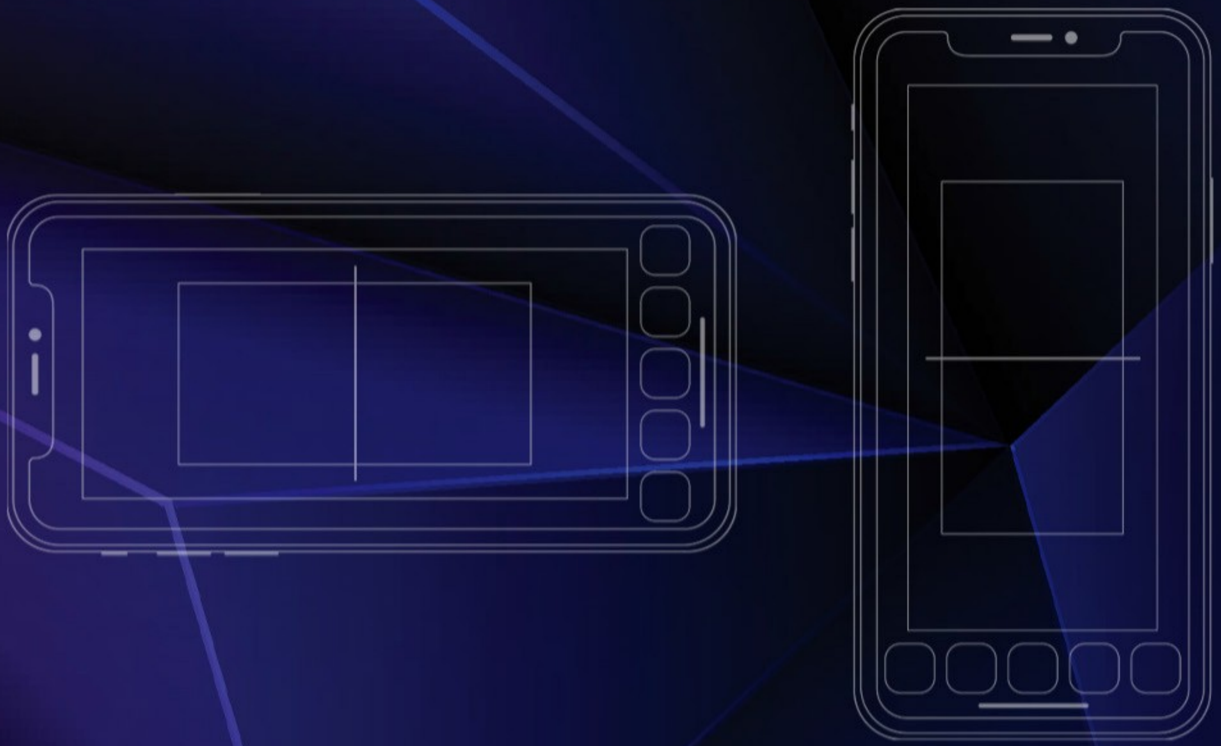

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Image: George Walker

VISUAL ARTISTS FIGHT BACK AGAINST AI COMPANIES FOR REPURPOSING THEIR WORK

Kelly McKernan's acrylic and watercolor paintings are bold and vibrant, often featuring feminine figures rendered in bright greens, blues, pinks and purples. The style, in the artist's words, is "surreal, ethereal ... dealing with discomfort in the human journey."

The word "human" has a special resonance for McKernan these days. Although it's always been a challenge to eke out a living as a visual artist — and the pandemic made it worse — McKernan now sees an existential threat from a medium that's decidedly not human: artificial intelligence.

Image: George Walker IV

It’s been about a year since McKernan, who uses the pronoun they, began noticing online images eerily similar to their own distinctive style that were apparently generated by entering their name into an AI engine.

The Nashville-based McKernan, 37, who creates both fine art and digital illustrations, soon learned that companies were feeding artwork into AI systems used to “train” image-generators — something that once sounded like a weird sci-fi movie but now threatens the livelihood of artists worldwide.

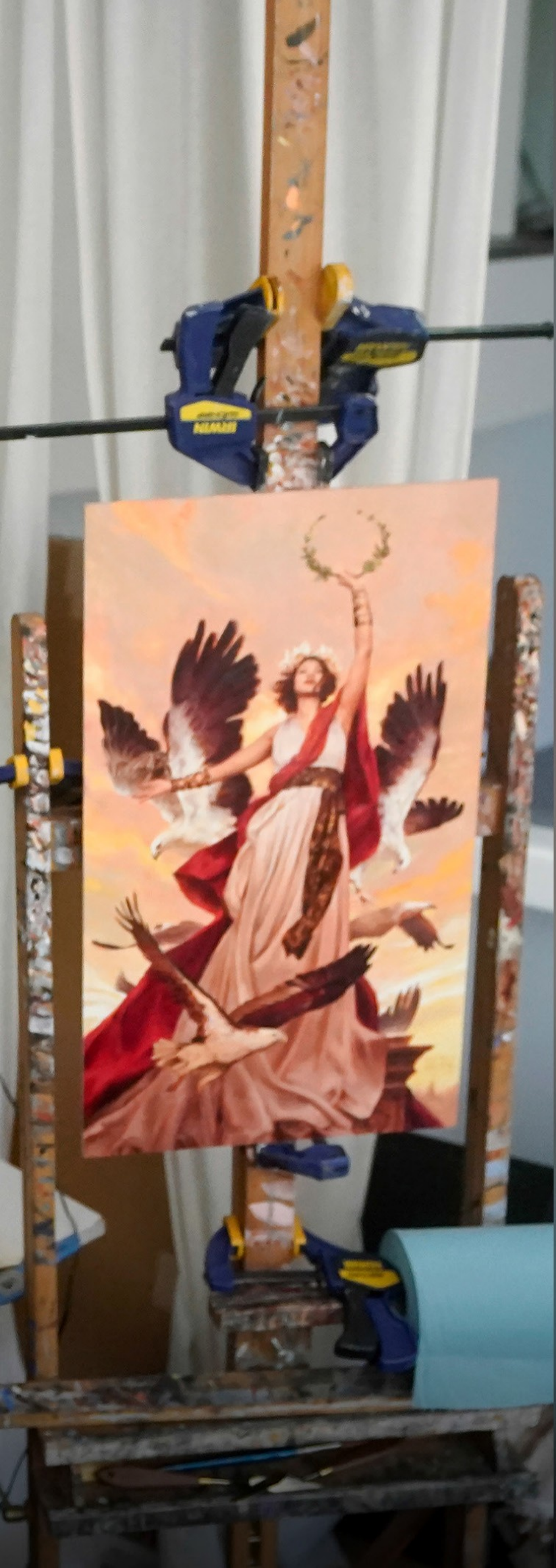
“People were tagging me on Twitter, and I would respond, ‘Hey, this makes me uncomfortable. I didn’t give my consent for my name or work to be used this way,’” the artist said in a recent interview, their bright blue-green hair mirroring their artwork. “I even reached out to some of these companies to say ‘Hey, little artist here, I know you’re not thinking of me at all, but it would be really cool if you didn’t use my work like this.’ And, crickets, absolutely nothing.”

McKernan is now one of three artists who are seeking to protect their copyrights and careers by suing makers of AI tools that can generate new imagery on command.

A lawsuit filed by three visual artists against artificial intelligence image-generators may serve as an early bellwether of how hard it will be for all kinds of creators to stop AI developers from profiting off their work. (Aug. 31)

The case awaits a decision from a San Francisco federal judge, who has voiced some doubt about whether AI companies are infringing on copyrights when they analyze billions of images and spit out something different.

Image: Jeff Chiu



“We’re David against Goliath here,” McKernan says. “At the end of the day, someone’s profiting from my work. I had rent due yesterday, and I’m $200 short. That’s how desperate things are right now. And it just doesn’t feel right.”

The lawsuit may serve as an early bellwether of how hard it will be for all kinds of creators — Hollywood actors, novelists, musicians and computer programmers — to stop AI developers from profiting off what humans have made.

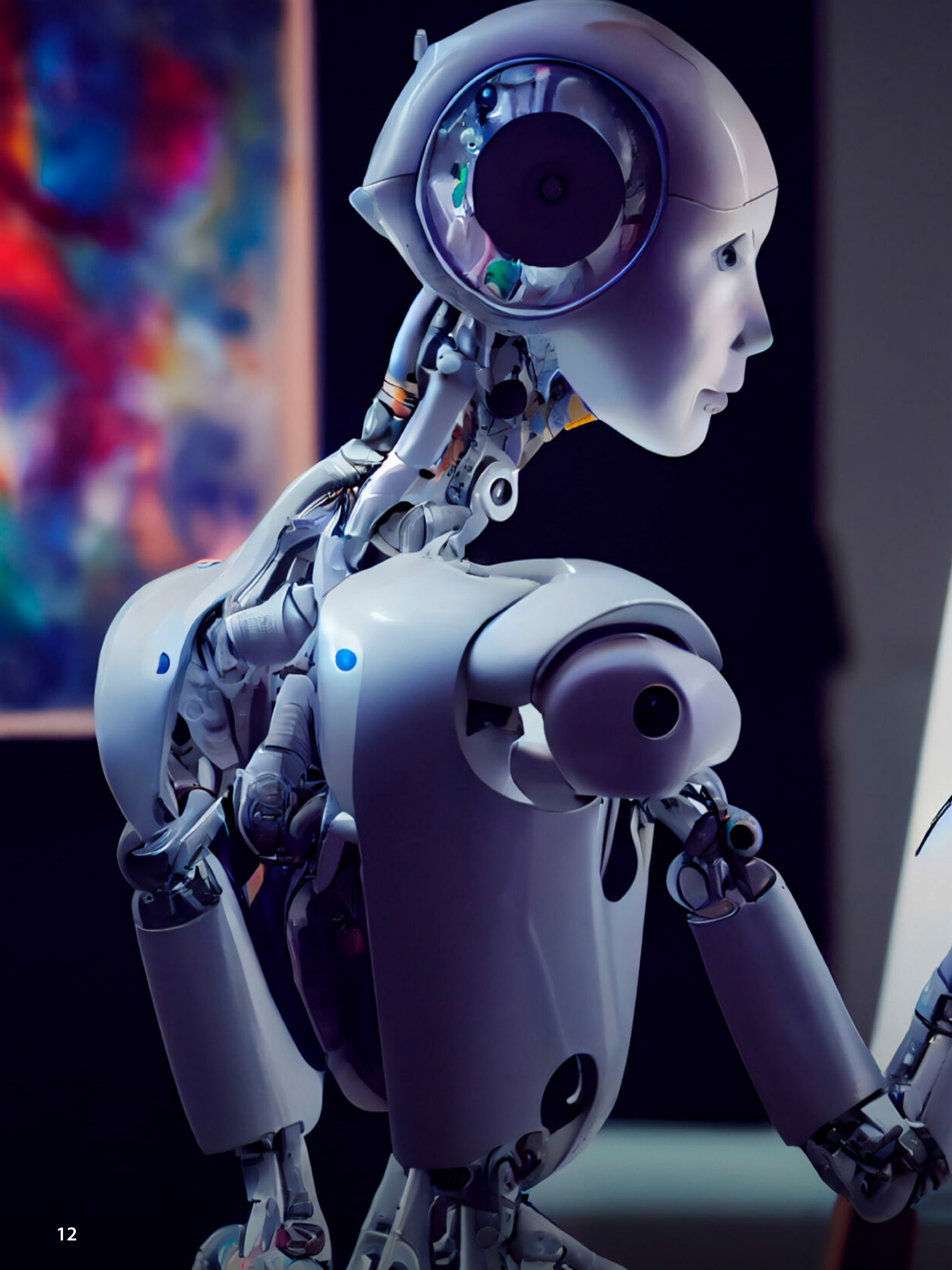
The case was filed in January by McKernan and fellow artists Karla Ortiz and Sarah Andersen, on behalf of others like them, against Stability AI, the London-based maker of text-to-image generator Stable Diffusion. The complaint also named another popular image-generator, Midjourney, and the online gallery DeviantArt.

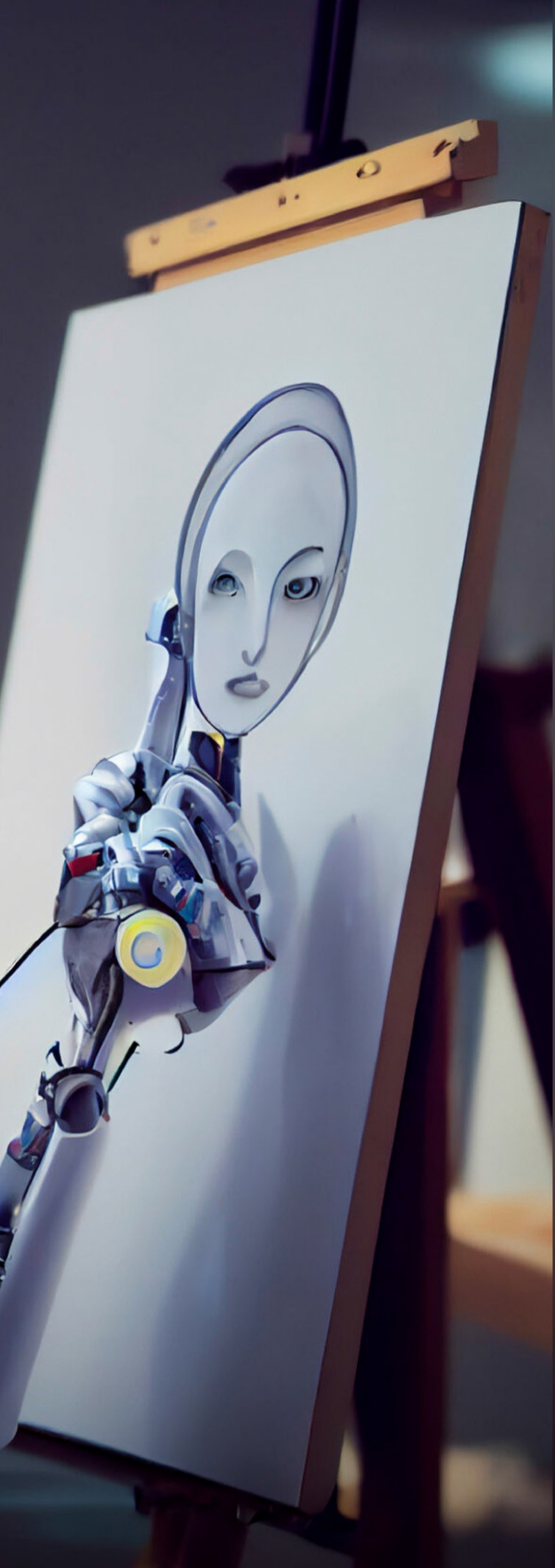
The suit alleges that the AI image-generators violate the rights of millions of artists by ingesting huge troves of digital images and then producing derivative works that compete against the originals.

The artists say they are not inherently opposed to AI, but they don’t want to be exploited by it. They are seeking class-action damages and a court order to stop companies from exploiting artistic works without consent.

Stability AI declined to comment. In a court filing, the company said it creates “entirely new and unique images” using simple word prompts, and that its images don’t or rarely resemble the images in the training data.

“Stability AI enables creation; it is not a copyright infringer,” it said.





Midjourney and DeviantArt didn’t return emailed requests for comment.

Much of the sudden proliferation of image-generators can be traced to a single, enormous research database, known as the Large-scale Artificial Intelligence Open Network, or LAION, run by a schoolteacher in Hamburg, Germany.

The teacher, Christoph Schuhmann, said he has no regrets about the nonprofit project, which is not a defendant in the lawsuit and has largely escaped copyright challenges by creating an index of links to publicly accessible images without storing them. But the educator said he understands why artists are concerned.

“In a few years, everyone can generate anything — video, images, text. Anything that you can describe, you can generate it in such a way that no human can tell the difference between AI-generated content and professional human-generated content,” Schuhmann said in an interview.

The idea that such a development is inevitable — that it is, essentially, the future — was at the heart of a U.S. Senate hearing in July in which Ben Brooks, head of public policy for Stability AI, acknowledged that artists are not paid for their images.

“There is no arrangement in place,” Brooks said, at which point Hawaii Democratic Sen. Mazie Hirono asked Ortiz whether she had ever been compensated by AI makers.

“I have never been asked. I have never been credited. I have never been compensated one penny, and that’s for the use of almost the entirety of my work, both personal and commercial, senator,” she replied.

Image: George Walker IV

You could hear the fury in the voice of Ortiz, also 37, of San Francisco, a concept artist and illustrator in the entertainment industry. Her work has been used in movies including "Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 3," "Loki," "Rogue One: A Star Wars Story," "Jurassic World" and "Doctor Strange." In the latter, she was responsible for the design of Doctor Strange's costume.

"We're kind of the blue-collar workers within the art world," Ortiz said in an interview. "We provide visuals for movies or games. We're the first people to take a stab at, what does a visual look like? And that provides a blueprint for the rest of the production."

But it's easy to see how AI-generated images can compete, Ortiz says. And it's not merely a hypothetical possibility. She said she has personally been part of several productions that have used AI imagery.

"It's overnight an almost billion-dollar industry. They just took our work, and suddenly we're seeing our names being used thousands of times, even hundreds of thousands of times."

In at least a temporary win for human artists, another federal judge in August upheld a decision by the U.S. Copyright Office to deny someone's attempt to copyright an AI-generated artwork.

But Ortiz fears that artists will soon be deemed too expensive. Why, she asks, would employers pay artists' salaries if they can buy "a subscription for a month for $30" and generate anything?

And if the technology is this good now, she adds, what will it be like in a few years?

"My fear is that our industry will be diminished to such a point that very few of us can make a living," Ortiz says, anticipating that artists will be tasked with simply editing AI-generated images, rather than creating. "The fun parts of my job, the things that make artists live and breathe — all of that is outsourced to a machine."

McKernan, too, fears what is yet to come: "Will I even have work a year from now?"

For now, both artists are throwing themselves into the legal fight — a fight that centers on preserving what makes people human, says McKernan, whose Instagram profile reads: "Advocating for human artists."

"I mean, that's what makes me want to be alive," says the artist, referring to the process of artistic creation. The battle is worth fighting "because that's what being human is to me."

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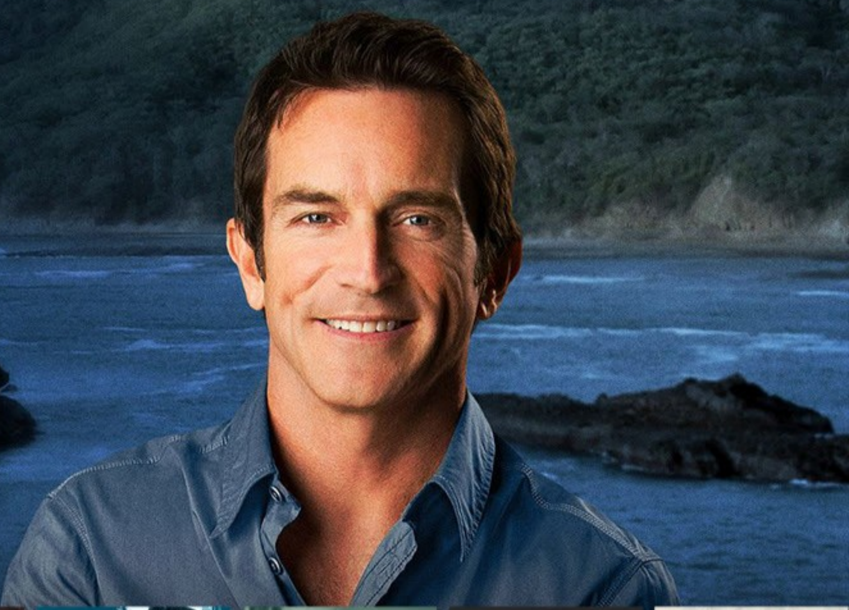

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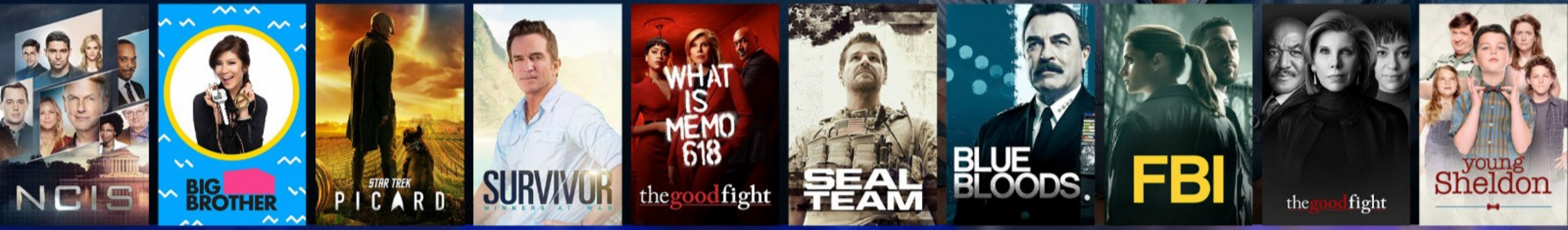
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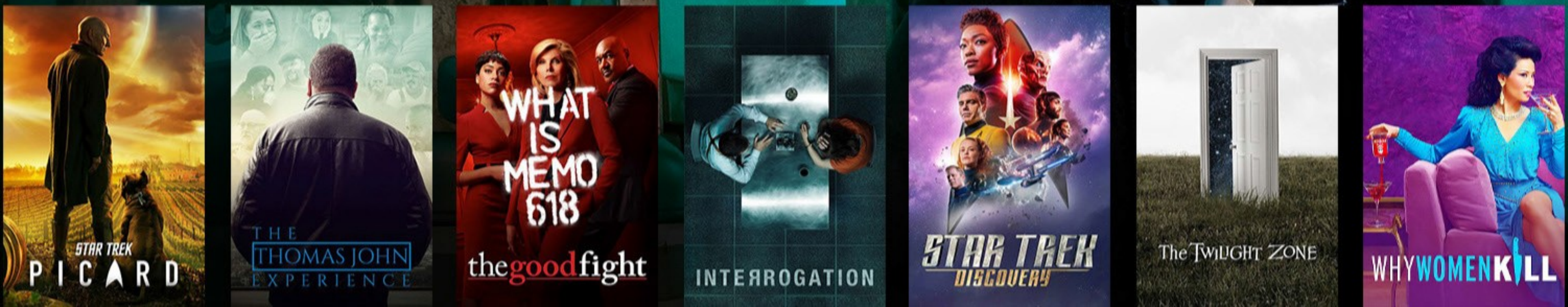
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JCPENNEY IS SPENDING $1 BILLION ON STORE AND ONLINE UPGRADES IN LATEST BID TO REVIVE ITS BUSINESS

JCPenney said Thursday it plans to spend more than $1 billion by the end of 2025 in a bid to revive the storied but troubled 121-year-old department store chain.

The money is going toward remodeling JCPenney stores, upgrading its online shopping site and app, and making its supply network more efficient so that online orders are delivered more quickly.

JCPenney's CEO Marc Rosen, who took the company's helm in November 2021 and has served as an executive at Levi Strauss and Walmart, is renewing the chain's focus on its core middle-income shoppers with affordable fashion and housewares.

"Now is the time more than ever to lean into that and make sure that we're delivering that experience for our customer," Rosen said in an interview. That's a change of tactics from previous management teams that pursued wealthier shoppers with offers of trendy items and major appliances.

As part of the plans unveiled Thursday, check-out stations that had been located throughout JCPenney's stores will be replaced with a single area of cashiers. Shoppers will also see brighter lighting and a fresh coat of paint. Store employees will be equipped with mobile devices to scan inventory and ring up shoppers' purchases. And the chain is making upgrades to its Wi-Fi networks to speed up in-store connections.

But JCPenney is playing catch-up with its competitors — from discounters to department stores like Macy's and Walmart — that have been upgrading their stores and online businesses, underscoring the challenges faced by the retailer based in Plano, Texas.

JCPenney, which emerged from Chapter 11 reorganization in December 2020 with new owners, not only has grappled with years of internal issues but also faces an uncertain economy that has challenged healthier department stores.

The chain's core customers are budget-conscious families, whose median income ranges from $50,000 to $75,000. They've been particularly hit hard by higher costs basic items and high interest rates, making borrowing on credit cards and taking out a mortgage more expensive.

Rosen said JCPenney's customers are spending $700 more per month than two years ago just for basic necessities, like rent, gas and food. He noted they're seeking competitive prices as well as a good shopping experience.

But in this tough economy, JCPenney has a role, Rosen said. He believes shoppers are finding other department stores too expensive, while online retailers and off-price stores don't give them the customer service JCPenney shoppers are looking for.

The company filed for bankruptcy reorganization in May 2020 after the pandemic-induced temporary closing of stores put the already struggling retailer deeper in peril.

Under new owners — mall companies Simon Property Group Inc. and Brookfield Property Partners LP — JCPenney shuttered nearly a quarter of its 850 stores. It now has roughly 650 stores. It has less than $500 million in debt, down from nearly $5 billion at the time of its bankruptcy filing, Rosen said.

As part of the latest remodeling push, Rosen said 100 stores have been refurbished. The plan is to

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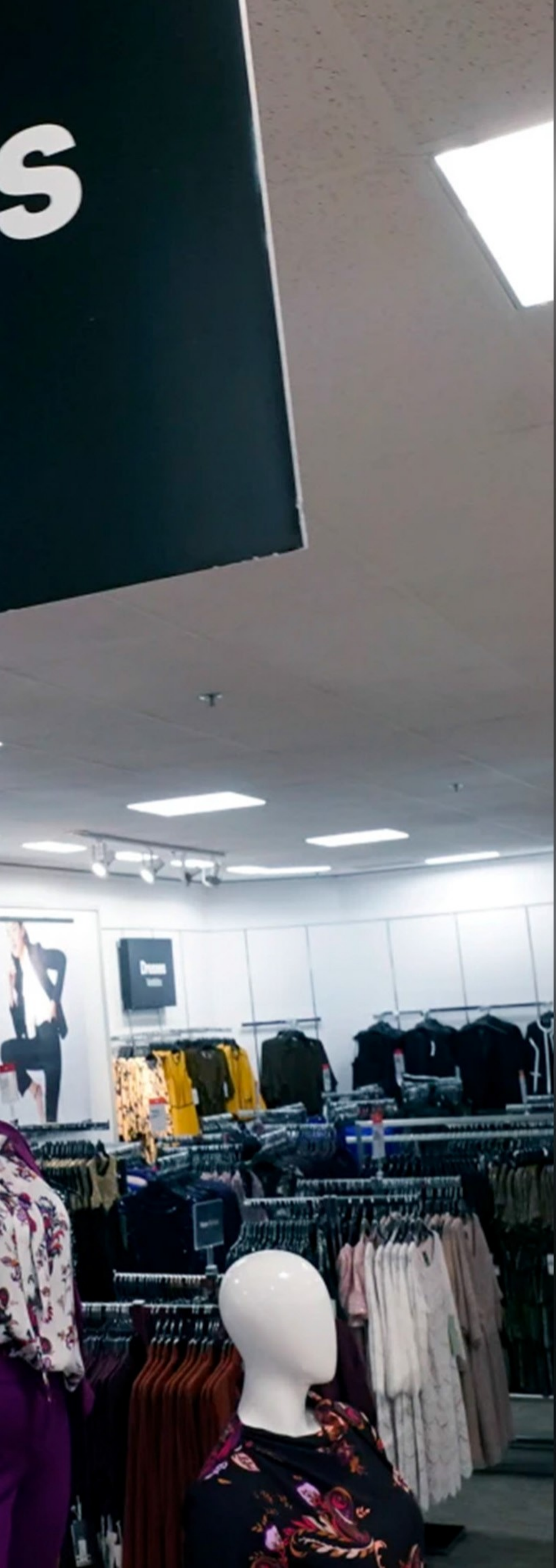

remodel anywhere from 50 to 100 per year, he said.

The retailer has been rebuilding its beauty business after Sephora announced a deal to leave the chain for rival Kohl's three years ago. As part of its overhaul, it has been highlighting beauty products that cover a wider range of skin tones. One third of its customers are of color. The company said that more than 50% of its beauty brands are either owned by females or people of color.

The retailer launched new store label brands like Mutual Weave men's clothing and reintroduced some national brands like Adidas. It launched national labels such as Forever 21, owned by Authentic Brands Group LLC, which has a minority stake in JCPenney. It also teamed up with celebrity stylist Jason Bolden to recreate collections for two of its store label brands, J. Ferrar and Worthington, a long-time brand it brought back.

Most importantly, Rosen said JCPenney has worked hard to keep the basics like jeans, white-T-shirts, and sheet sets in stock with the full size range or full color assortment, a problem that has plagued the chain and frustrated shoppers.

Rosen said the changes have helped increase the number of repeat visits of existing customers to both stores and online. More than 50 million customers have visited JCPenney in the past three years, he said. After about five years of declines, it's now seeing customers coming to JCPenney more frequently — a 5% increase. As for its beauty departments,25% are new customers, he noted.

"That's showing us that if we get the basic relevant experience right, then they're going to come to us more frequently because they know the brand,

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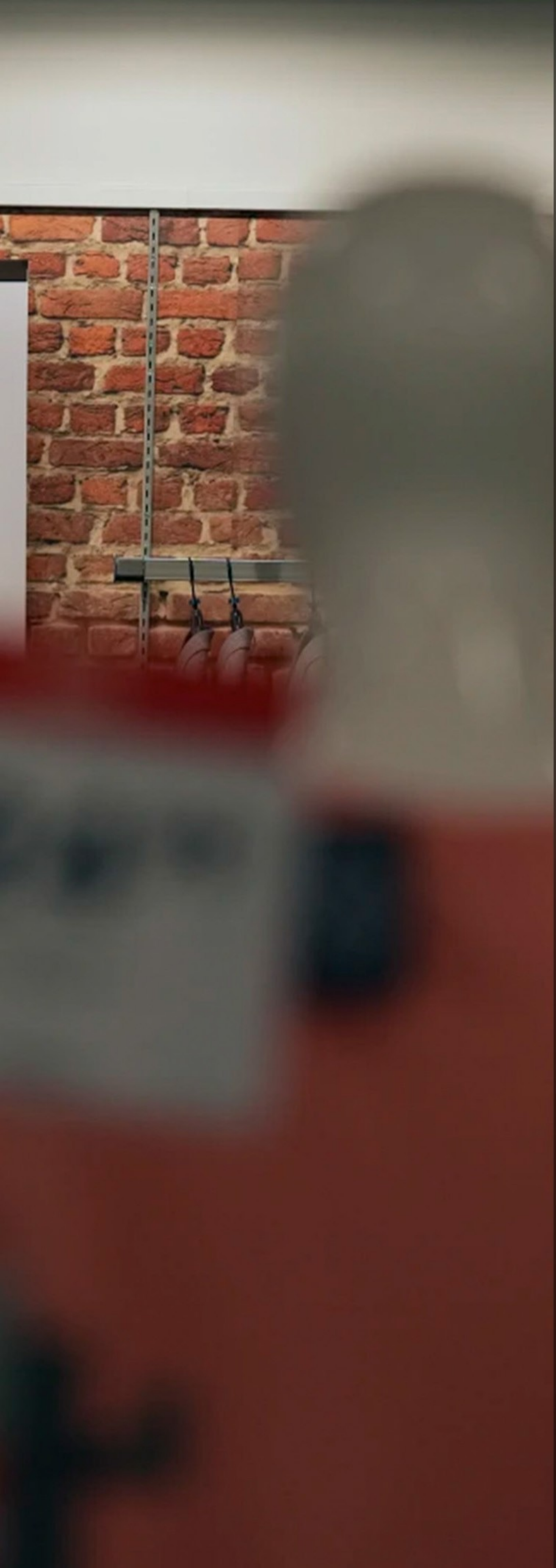

they’re shopping us already and they’re now starting to shop across more areas of the store and come more frequently, “ he said.

Placer.ai, which tracks people’s movements via cellphone usage, show that visits for JCPenney stores are down 24% compared with the year-ago period.

Rosen arrived at JCPenney when its annual revenue ranged between $8 billion and $9 billion and that number was unchanged last year. He expects it could decline slightly this year because of all the economic uncertainty. It had annual sales of roughly $11.2 billion when it filed for bankruptcy, but also ran more stores back then.

Neil Saunders, managing director of GlobalData Retail, said he was recently at a JCPenney store in Phoenix, and the stores looked messy, and there were gaps on shelves. But he did praise the beauty area.

“They may have steadied the ship, but they have not revived the brand,” he said.

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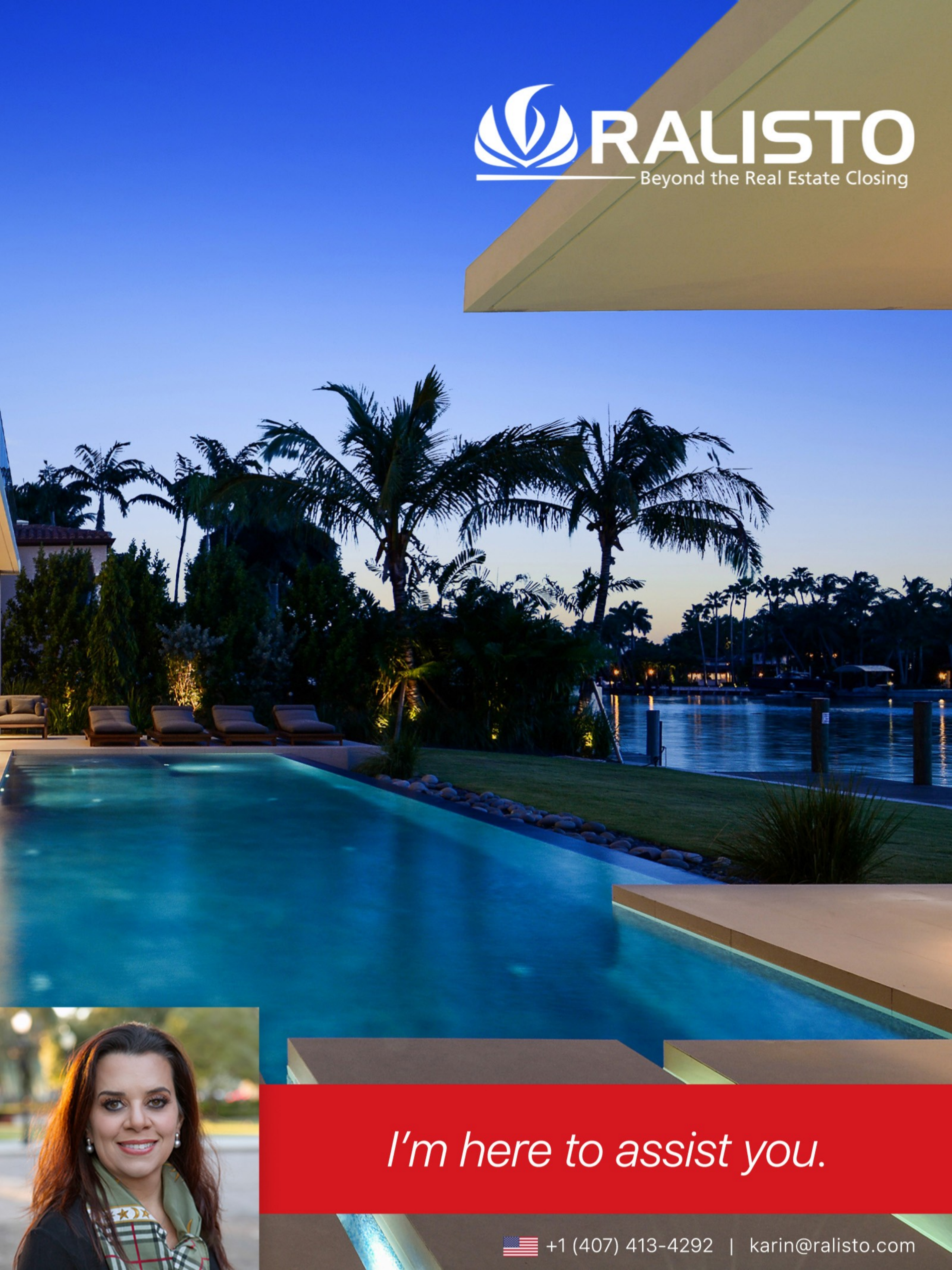
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THE AVERAGE LONG-TERM US MORTGAGE RATE FELL TO 7.18% THIS WEEK, EASING FROM MORE THAN 20-YEAR HIGH

The average long-term U.S. mortgage rate slipped after climbing for five consecutive weeks to a more than 20-year high, a modest relief for would-be homebuyers challenged by rising home prices and a thin inventory of homes on the market.

Mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said Thursday that the average rate on the benchmark 30-year home loan fell to 7.18% from 7.23% last week. A year ago, the rate averaged 5.66%.

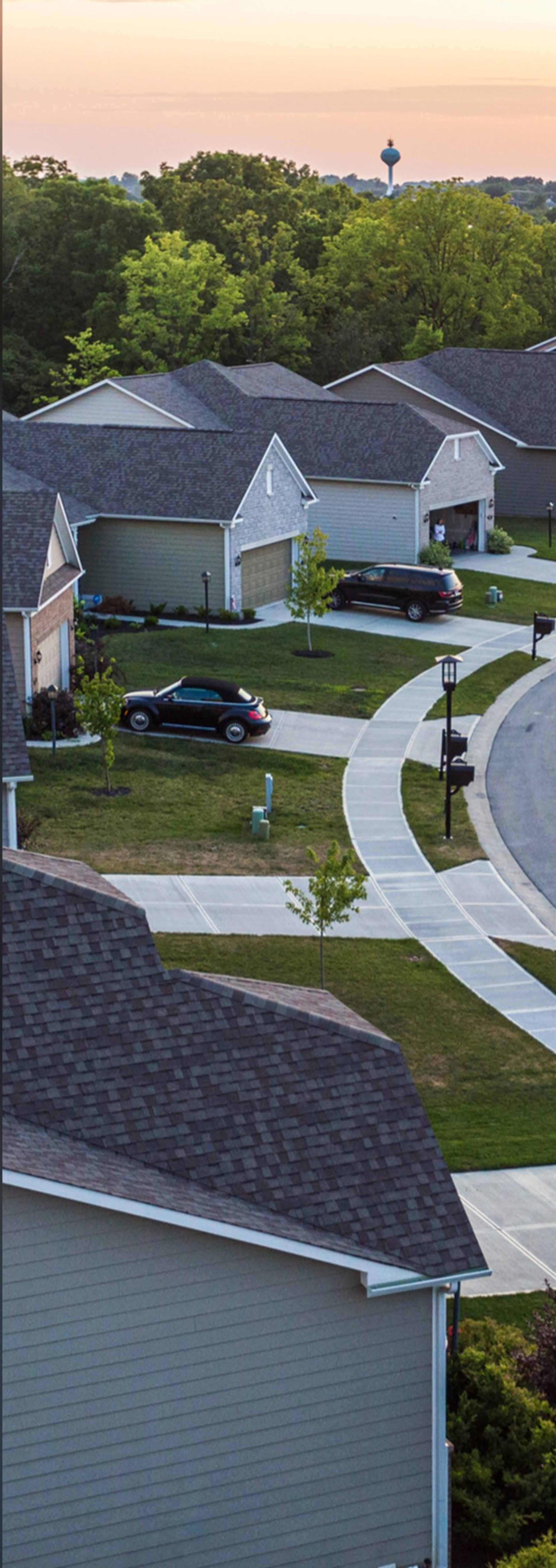
The average rate is now the lowest it's been in two weeks, but remains above 7%. High rates can add hundreds of dollars a month in costs for borrowers, limiting how much they can afford in a market already unaffordable to many Americans. They also discourage homeowners who locked in low rates two years ago from selling.

The average rate on 15-year fixed-rate mortgages, popular with those refinancing their homes, was 6.55%, unchanged from last week. A year ago, it averaged 4.98%, Freddie Mac said.

Mortgage rates climbed for much of August along with the 10-year Treasury yield, which is used by lenders to price rates on mortgages and other loans.

The yield, which last week neared its highest level since 2007, rose sharply as bond traders reacted to reports showing the U.S. economy remains remarkably resilient. That's stoked worries that the Federal Reserve will conclude that it needs to keep interest rates higher for longer in order to crush inflation.

But this week, the 10-year Treasury yield has been falling following economic reports showing consumer confidence tumbled in August and job openings fell to the lowest level since March 2021. On Thursday, the government reported that its personal



consumption and expenditures report, a measure of inflation closely tracked by the Federal Reserve, remained low in July.

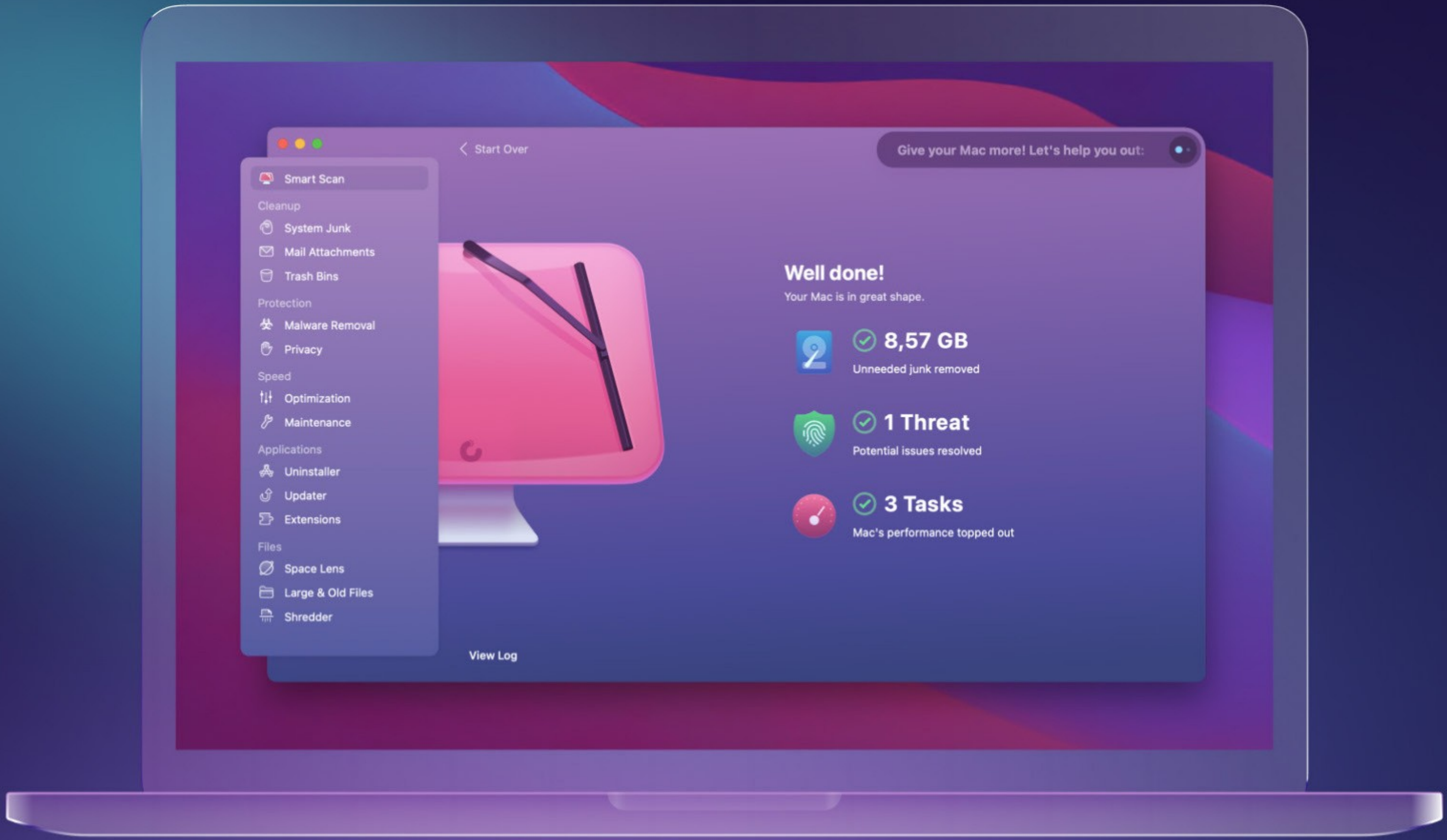
The central bank held rates steady at its last meeting and is expected to do the same in September.

“Recent volatility makes it difficult to forecast where rates will go next, but we should have a better gauge in September as the Federal Reserve determines their next steps regarding interest rate hikes,” said Sam Khater, Freddie Mac’s chief economist.

High inflation drove the Federal Reserve to raise its benchmark interest rate 11 times since March 2022, lifting the fed funds rate to the highest level in 22 years. While mortgage rates don’t necessarily mirror the Fed’s rate increases, they tend to track the yield on the 10-year Treasury note. Investors’ expectations for future inflation, global demand for U.S. Treasurys and what the Fed does with interest rates can influence rates on home loans.

The average rate on a 30-year mortgage remains more than double what it was two years ago, when it was just 2.87%. Those ultra-low rates spurred a wave of home sales and refinancing. The sharply higher rates now are contributing to a dearth of available homes, as homeowners who locked in those lower borrowing costs two years ago are now reluctant to sell and jump into a higher rate on a new property.

The lack of housing supply is also weighing on sales of previously occupied U.S. homes, which are down 22.3% through the first seven months of the year versus the same stretch in 2022.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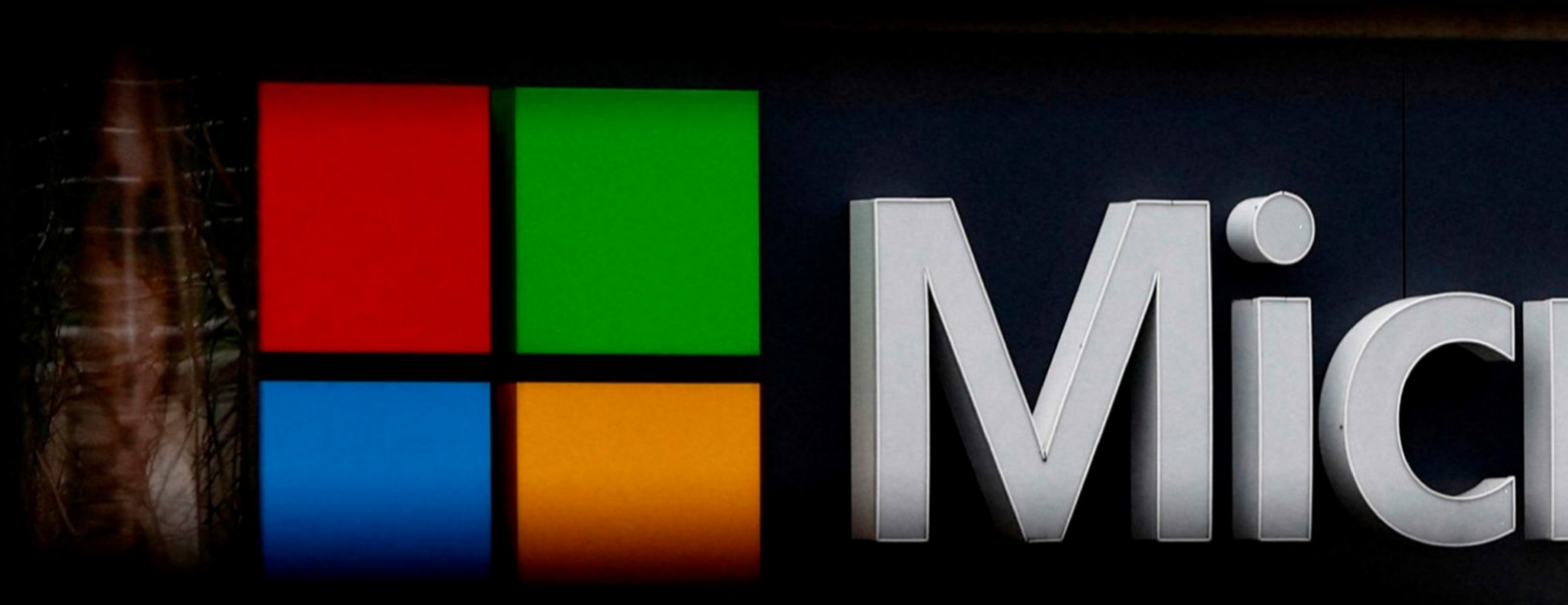


Mic

MICROSOFT TO STOP PACKAGING TEAMS AND OFFICE SOFTWARE IN EUROPE TO HEAD OFF EU ANTITRUST ACTION

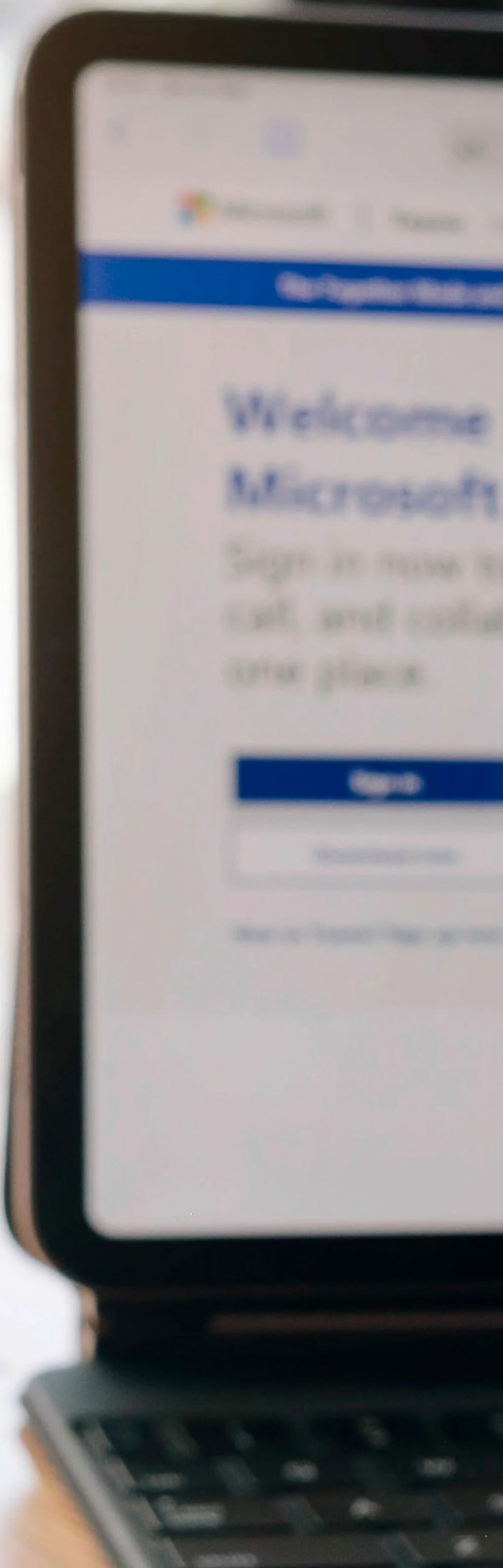
Microsoft will stop packaging its Teams videoconferencing app with its Office software in Europe in an effort to head off antitrust penalties by regulators.

The tech giant also said Thursday that it would take steps to make it easier for competing products to work alongside its software.

The announcement comes a month after the European Union's executive Commission, the 27-nation bloc's top competition enforcer, opened a formal investigation over concerns that bundling Teams with Office gives the company an unfair edge over competitors.

The investigation was triggered by a complaint filed in 2020 by Slack Technologies, maker of popular workplace messaging software.

Slack, owned by business software maker Salesforce, alleged that Microsoft was abusing its market dominance to eliminate competition — in violation of EU laws — by illegally combining Teams with its Office suite, which includes Word, Excel and Outlook.



“Today we are announcing proactive changes that we hope will start to address these concerns in a meaningful way, even while the European Commission’s investigation continues and we cooperate with it,” Microsoft’s vice president of European government affairs, Nanna-Louise Linde, said in a blog post.

It’s not clear if the concessions will be enough to address the Commission’s concerns.

“We take note of Microsoft’s announcement,” a Commission spokesperson said. “We have no further comment to make.”

Linde said the changes were made to address EU concerns that customers should be able to buy Office without Teams for a cheaper price and “that we should do more to make interoperability easier” with rival communications and collaboration software.

The changes will take effect on Oct. 1 in the 30-nation European Economic Area and Switzerland. For its core enterprise customers, which represent most of its business in the region, Microsoft, based in Redmond, Washington, will cut the price by 2 euros ($2.17) per month for the Office package without Teams. Existing customers can stick with their current plan or switch to the version without Teams.

23:13
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Microsoft Teams
Welcome to Microsoft Teams!
A happier place for teams to
work together.
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Get help with signing in
Sign up for free

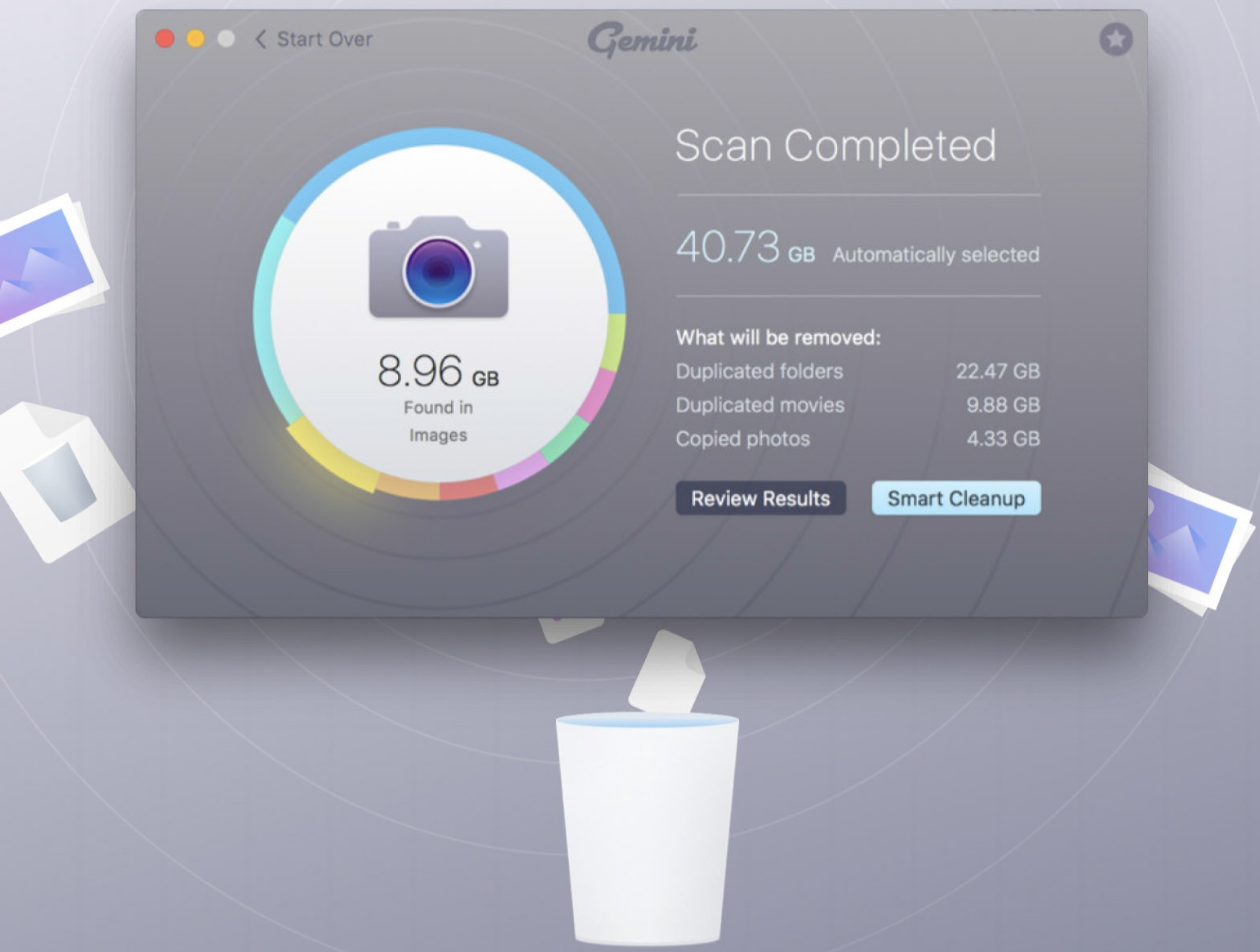
New business customers will be able to buy a separate standalone version of Teams for 5 euros a month.

Linde said Microsoft would give software developers more support, including by providing more information on how data can be removed from Teams and used in other software. The company will also make it easier for competitors to use Microsoft's functionality instead of building their own.

Microsoft and other U.S. tech giants have been facing pressure from Brussels over worries about their market dominance. The commission has investigated Google, Apple, Amazon and Facebook and Instagram owner Meta.

Microsoft, which last faced an EU antitrust investigation more than a decade ago, is also trying to save its $69 billion purchase of video game maker Activision. That deal was cleared by the Commission, but has been bogged down in Britain.

Image: Drew Angerer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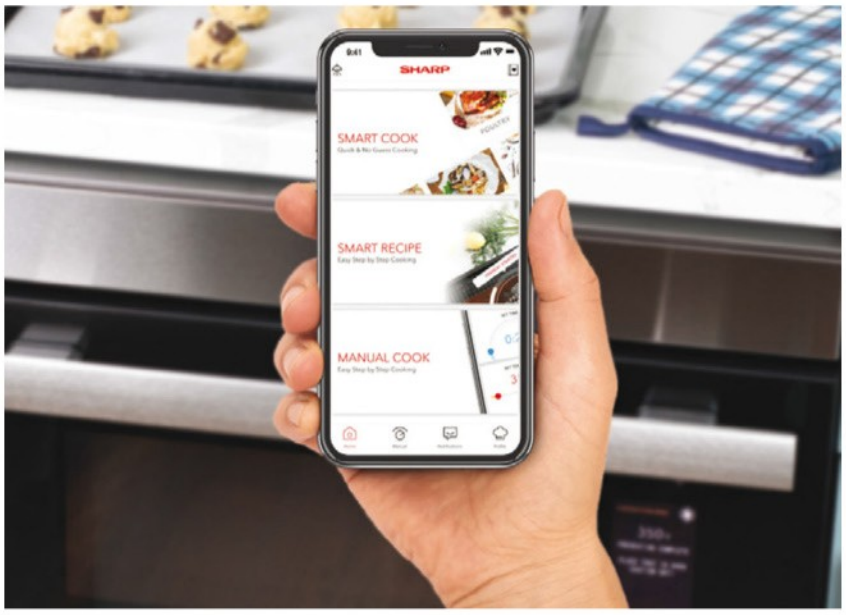

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HOW PAYPAL IS USING AI TO COMBAT FRAUD, AND MAKE IT EASIER TO PAY

Artificial intelligence has been the buzzword of 2023 ever since ChatGPT made its public debut earlier this year, with businesses, schools, universities and even non-profits looking for ways to integrate AI in their operations.

John Kim, chief product officer for PayPal, spoke about how the company is using the early proliferation of artificial intelligence technologies in its business, as well as PayPal's future in payments when there's so much competition. The interview has been edited for length and clarity.

Q: HOW HAVE SECURITY ISSUES CHANGED SINCE YOU'VE BEEN IN THIS ROLE OR SIMILAR ROLES? HOW MUCH MORE COMPLICATED OR SOPHISTICATED ARE THREATS OR OPPORTUNITIES TO PROTECT CUSTOMER DATA?

A: One way you you can put it is that the fraud is a pretty big business, it's growing and getting more sophisticated by the day. It used to be that you would get, let's say, an email sent to you and you'd find something off about it, right? Like there's a misspelling and you think "Gosh, I don't see this person misspelling this common thing" or the email seems to imply that it doesn't have a deep understanding of who I am. Then it became voices over the phone trying to convince you to do something. Now people can create whole identities using AI.

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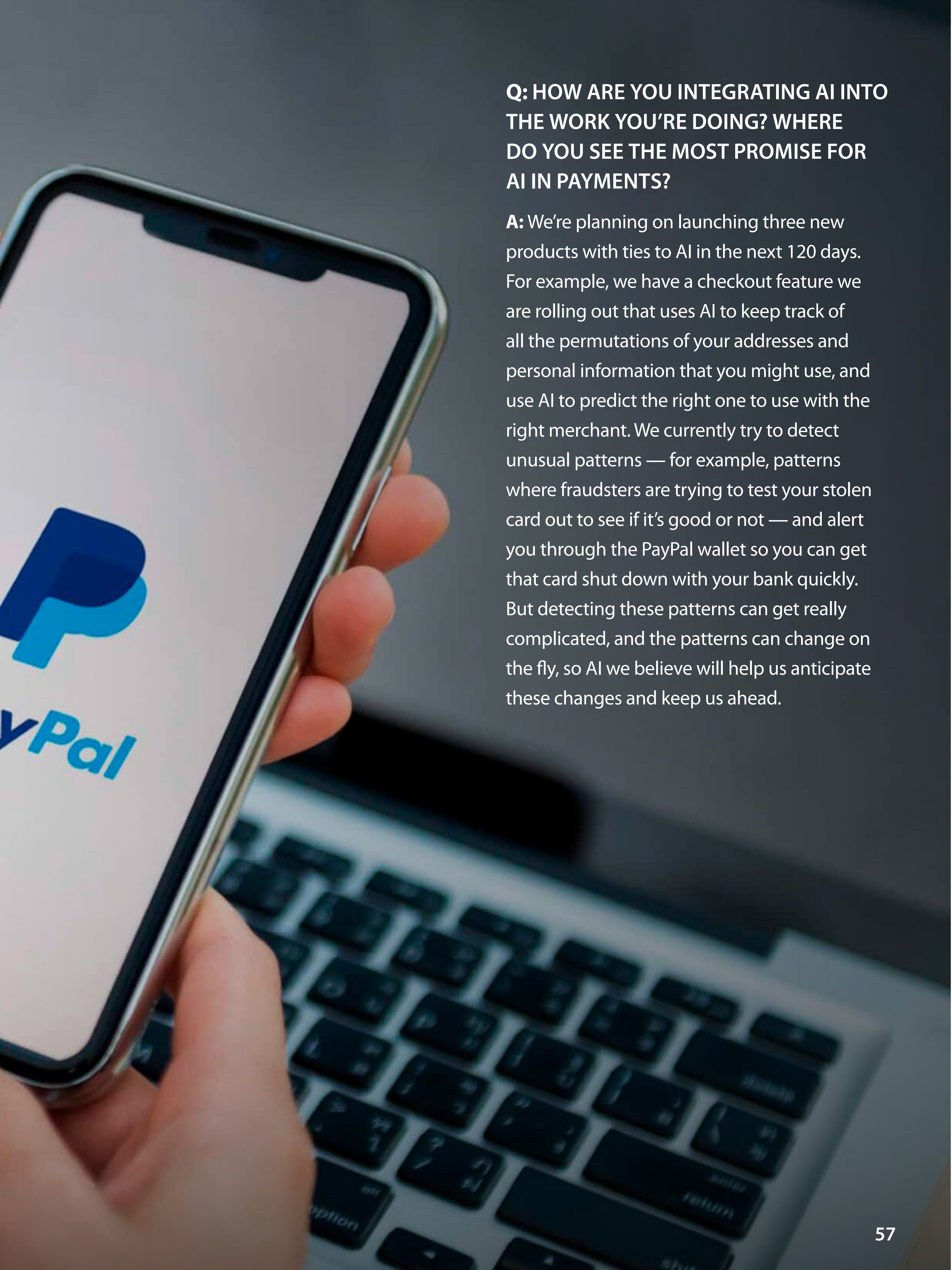

Q: HOW ARE YOU INTEGRATING AI INTO THE WORK YOU'RE DOING? WHERE DO YOU SEE THE MOST PROMISE FOR AI IN PAYMENTS?

A: We're planning on launching three new products with ties to AI in the next 120 days. For example, we have a checkout feature we are rolling out that uses AI to keep track of all the permutations of your addresses and personal information that you might use, and use AI to predict the right one to use with the right merchant. We currently try to detect unusual patterns — for example, patterns where fraudsters are trying to test your stolen card out to see if it's good or not — and alert you through the PayPal wallet so you can get that card shut down with your bank quickly. But detecting these patterns can get really complicated, and the patterns can change on the fly, so AI we believe will help us anticipate these changes and keep us ahead.

Q: BUT ON THAT SAME POINT, WHERE DO YOU THINK AI IS BEING OVERSOLD IN SOME WAYS, OR WHERE DO YOU THINK THAT THE USE CASE IN YOUR INDUSTRY ISN'T REALLY THERE QUITE YET?

A: I think AI has captured a lot of people's imaginations this year. It's made its way to boardrooms, into stores, every product conversation. Some people have been skeptical, and I think some skepticism is healthy. For example, we want to use AI to increase our chatbots' capability to engage with customers, but how much do we invest in such technology — which can be expensive to develop and run — when a customer service agent could do it better? Cost is going to be a massive issue. But in this short timetable since ChatGPT launched in March, I think you can't dismiss any claim you hear about AI at the moment because it's moving so fast.

SQL
Robert Ross
PHP
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Robert Ross
PHP

Image: Muhammad Asyfaul

Q: A LOT OF COMPETITION HAS ENTERED INTO THE PAYMENTS SPACE IN THE LAST SEVERAL YEARS. APPLE PAY. GOOGLE PAY. BUY NOW, PAY LATER. PAYPAL IS THE OLDEST COMPANY IN THE ONLINE PAYMENTS INDUSTRY. WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE THERE BEEN IN TRYING TO DIFFERENTIATE PAYPAL FROM THE COMPETITION?

A: PayPal really was a one-of-a-kind company for much of the early part of its life. So back then it was really about just getting scale. You didn't really have to sell the value proposition. But now we really have to focus on the value proposition. Customers every day choose how they wish to pay for things, so you need to provide value above just being a method to pay, like security and fraud protection, or letting people now they are fully protected while at the same time making us the easiest way to pay.

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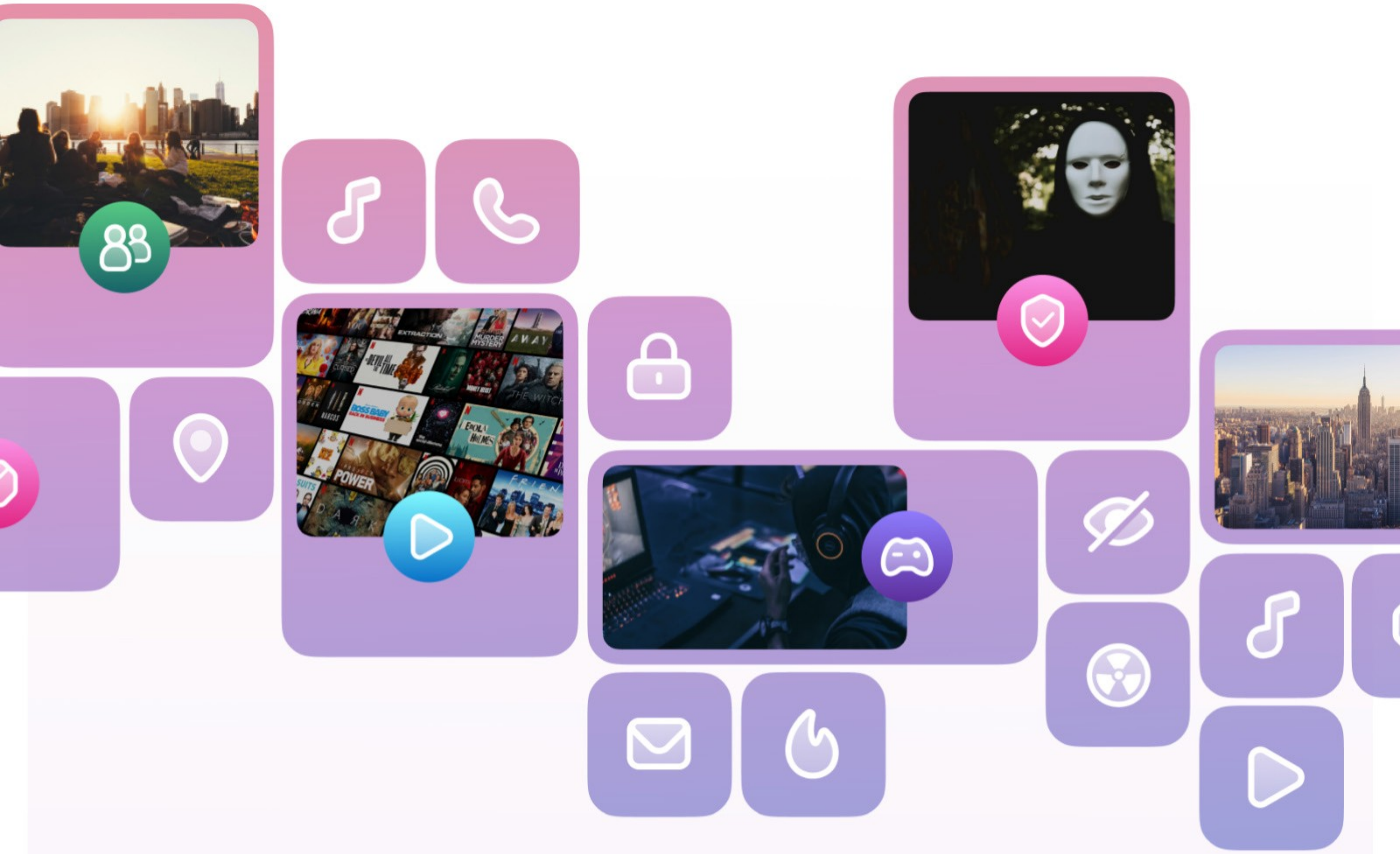

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BROADBAND SUBSIDY PROGRAM THAT MILLIONS USE WILL EXPIRE NEXT YEAR IF CONGRESS DOESN'T ACT

One of the features that President Joe Biden cited in his plan to bring internet to every home and business in the United States by 2030 was affordability. But an important federal program established to keep broadband costs down for low-income households is set to expire next year.

The Affordable Connectivity Program has not reached everyone who is eligible. According to enrollment and census data, less than than 40% of eligible households have utilized the program, which provides monthly subsidies of $30, and in some cases, up to $75, to help pay for internet connections.

Still, the program has been a lifeline for Kimberlyn Barton-Reyes, who is paraplegic and visually impaired. Barton-Reyes did not have to wait for an in-person appointment when a seizure-alert system disconnected from her electric wheelchair in November. The company that services her chair assessed the problem remotely, ordered the parts she needed and got the chair fixed quickly.

“Most people are like ‘Internet is not a basic need,’” said Barton-Reyes, who lives in Austin, Texas. “It absolutely is for me.”

Barton-Reyes relies on Social Security disability insurance for her income while she takes part in a vocational program for adults who are newly blind. She is able to pay for her internet connection with an assist from the Affordable Connectivity Program. Barton-Reyes, who said an autoimmune issue damaged her vision, is working to get other eligible Austin residents signed up, too.

But the program’s future is uncertain. Its primary source of funding, a $14.2 billion allocation, is projected to run out by the middle of 2024.

That could end access to affordable broadband for millions of people and hinder the Biden administration's push to bring connectivity to the people who need it most.

"ACP is the best tool we've ever had to help people afford broadband," said Drew Garner, broadband policy advisor for Common Sense Media.

Advocacy groups are pushing Congress to extend the program.

"It's a successful program in many ways, but with a lot of untapped potential because there's still a long way to go to really make this universal to all people that are eligible for ACP," said Hernan Galperin, a University of Southern California professor who has researched the program.

Enrollment in approximately 30 states lags behind the national average. Louisiana and Ohio have enrolled more than half of all eligible households.

"There's probably nowhere in the state, no matter how populated the location is, where someone is not receiving a benefit from the ACP program," said Veneeth Iyengar, executive director of Louisiana's broadband program.

Ryan Collins, the broadband program manager of the Buckeye Hills Regional Council in Appalachian Ohio, said the ACP provides crucial assistance.

"If it were a matter of affording groceries or affording the internet, they chose groceries and so they would cancel their subscription," Collins said.

The program emerged from a pandemic-era benefit and began with some 9 million households nationally. Participation has increased every month since, and today it serves approximately 20.4 million households.

"If the funding drops, all of that momentum will be lost," said Khotan Harmon, senior program officer for the city of Austin.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said the program has already proved itself.

"The Affordable Connectivity Program, the popularity of it, I think, is the kind of thing that will create the political-level support necessary for Congress to see that this is, at the end of the day, an appropriate utilization of resources," Vilsack said on a recent media call announcing new grants to bolster rural broadband.

Advocates say letting the program expire could damage the already tenuous relationship between consumers and internet service providers just as the nation embarks on an ambitious plan to expand access nationally.

"That will have longer-term breakdowns in our effort to close the digital divide if people are not believing the programs that we're offering them will be around for a while," said Joe Kane, director of broadband policy at the Information Technology and Innovation Foundation.

Biden announced plans in June to distribute $42.5 billion to ensure broadband access for every U.S. home and business. But internet service providers that bid on state contracts will want to be sure they have customers.

"So not only will the ACP ending make it harder for individuals to afford service, it will make it less likely that ISPs build them the service to begin with," Garner said.

Lawmakers from both parties, as well as the White House, support the program. Affordable internet was listed as a priority in an Aug. 10 letter from

Biden's budget director, Shalanda Young, to House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif.

Participation also straddles the political divide.

As of the end of June, approximately 9.3 million households in Democratic districts and about 9.1 million households in Republican districts receive the monthly benefit, according to AP's analysis.

Before receiving ACP benefits, New Hampshire-based mother Joanne Soares and her three school-age children had to use her phone to access the internet. Soares, who is deaf, said the home internet connection she can now afford lets her reliably access a video-based interpreting service needed to communicate over the phone.

"I need to have an internet to be able to connect with others," Soares said. "Without the internet, how am I supposed to make any calls?"

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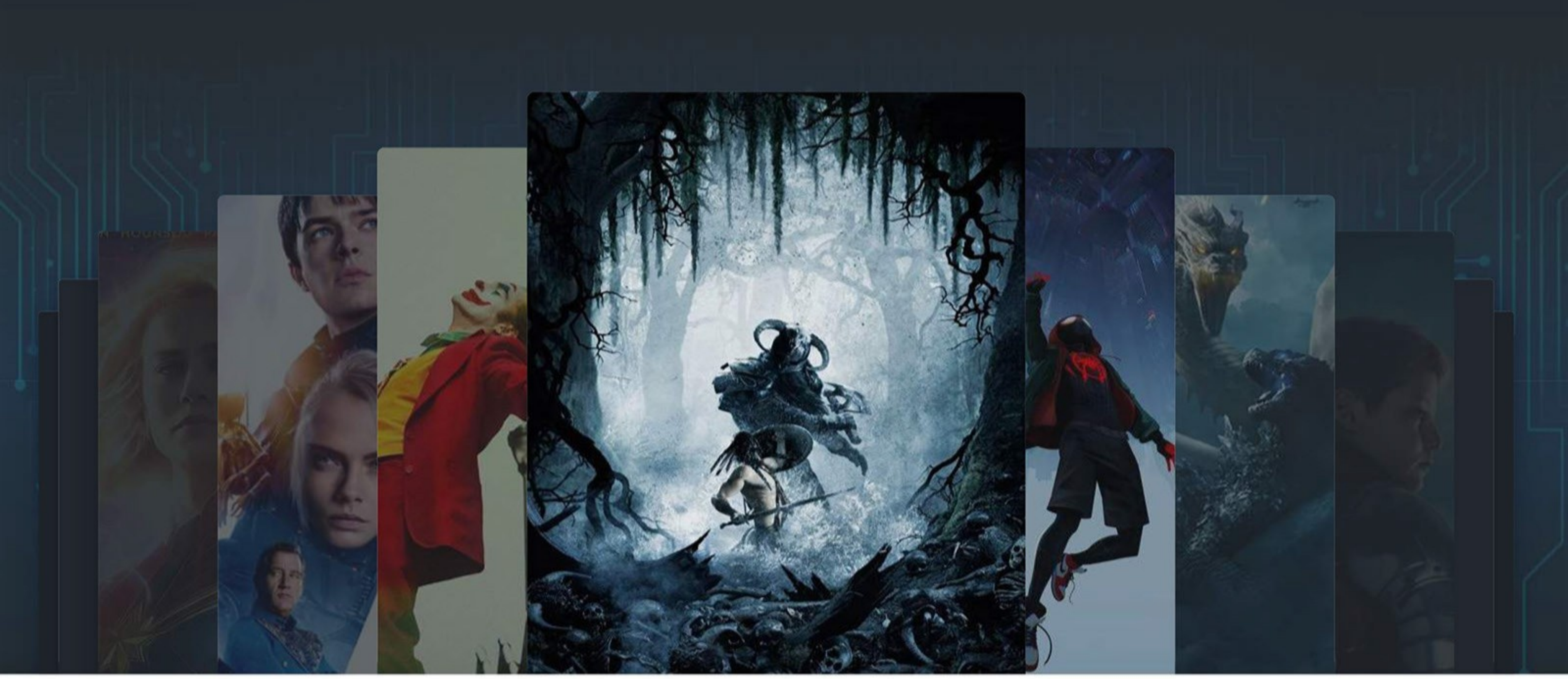

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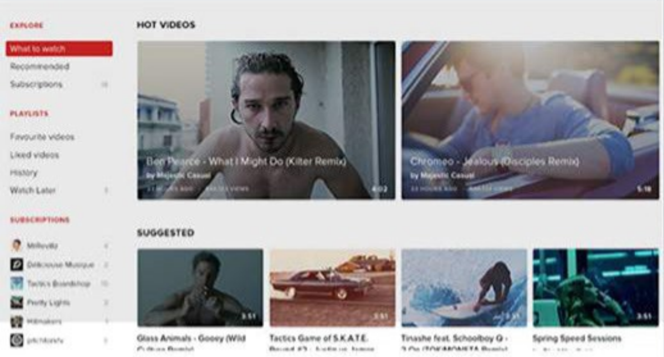

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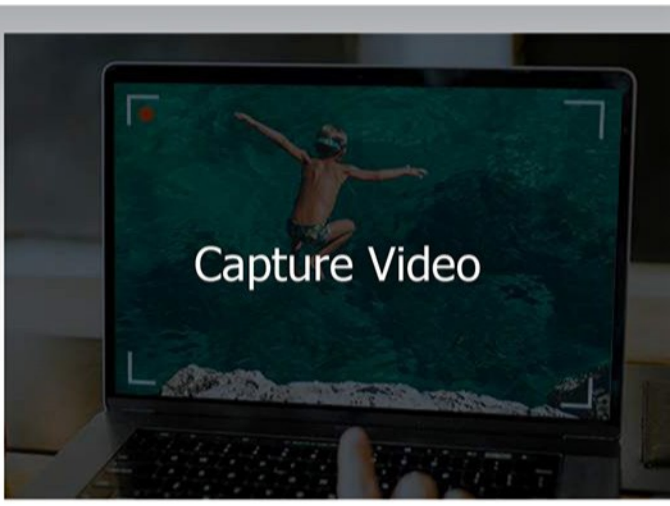

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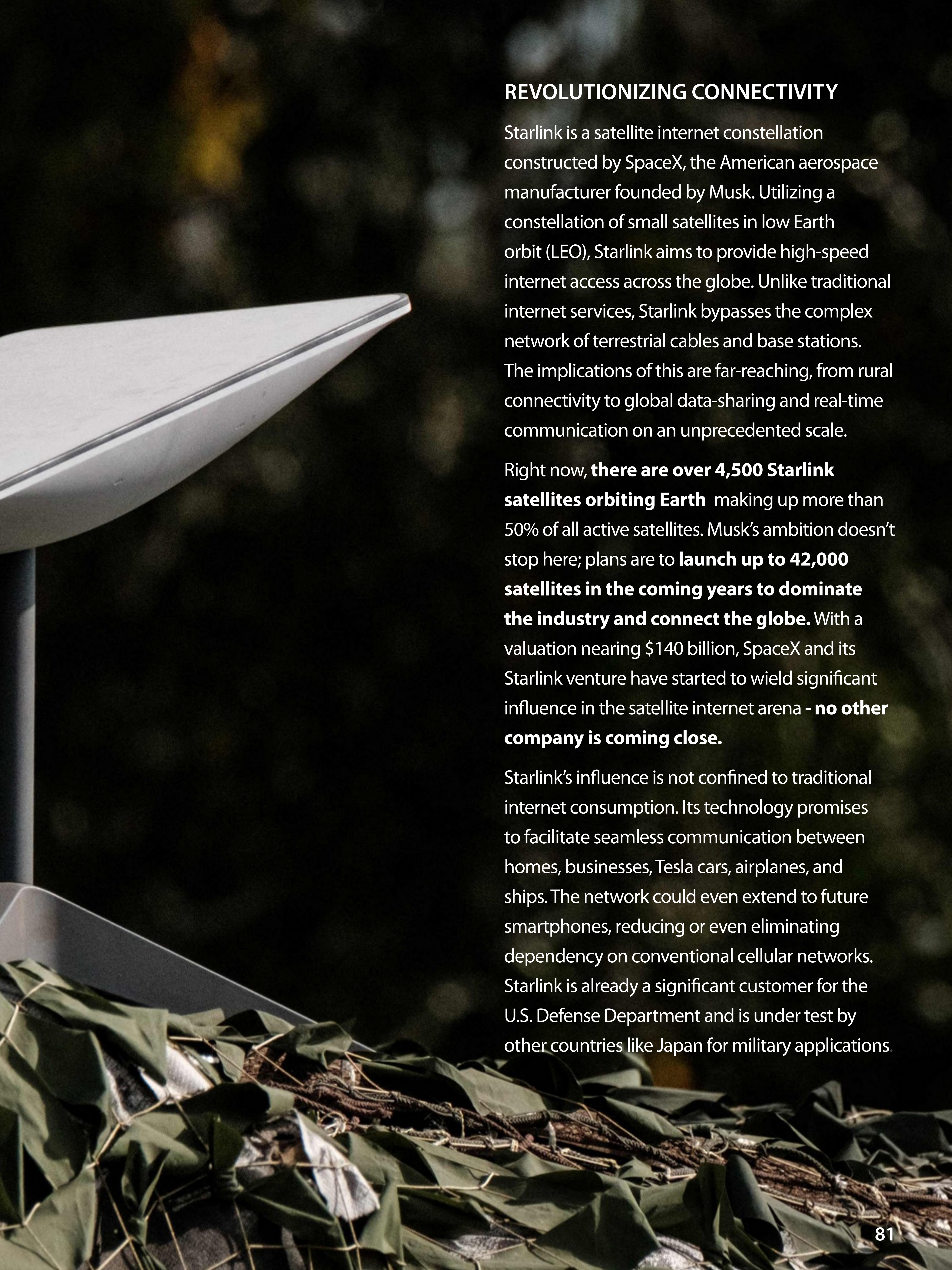
STARLINK

THE SPACEX SATELLITE NETWORK THAT WILL CONNECT EVERYTHING

In a world dependent on technology, Elon Musk is a name that often comes to mind. From X to Tesla, the entrepreneur has his fingers in a number of pies. One of Musk's ventures capturing both imagination and market share is Starlink, a global satellite-based internet service, which will revolutionize the way we think about the internet for decades ahead.



REVOLUTIONIZING CONNECTIVITY

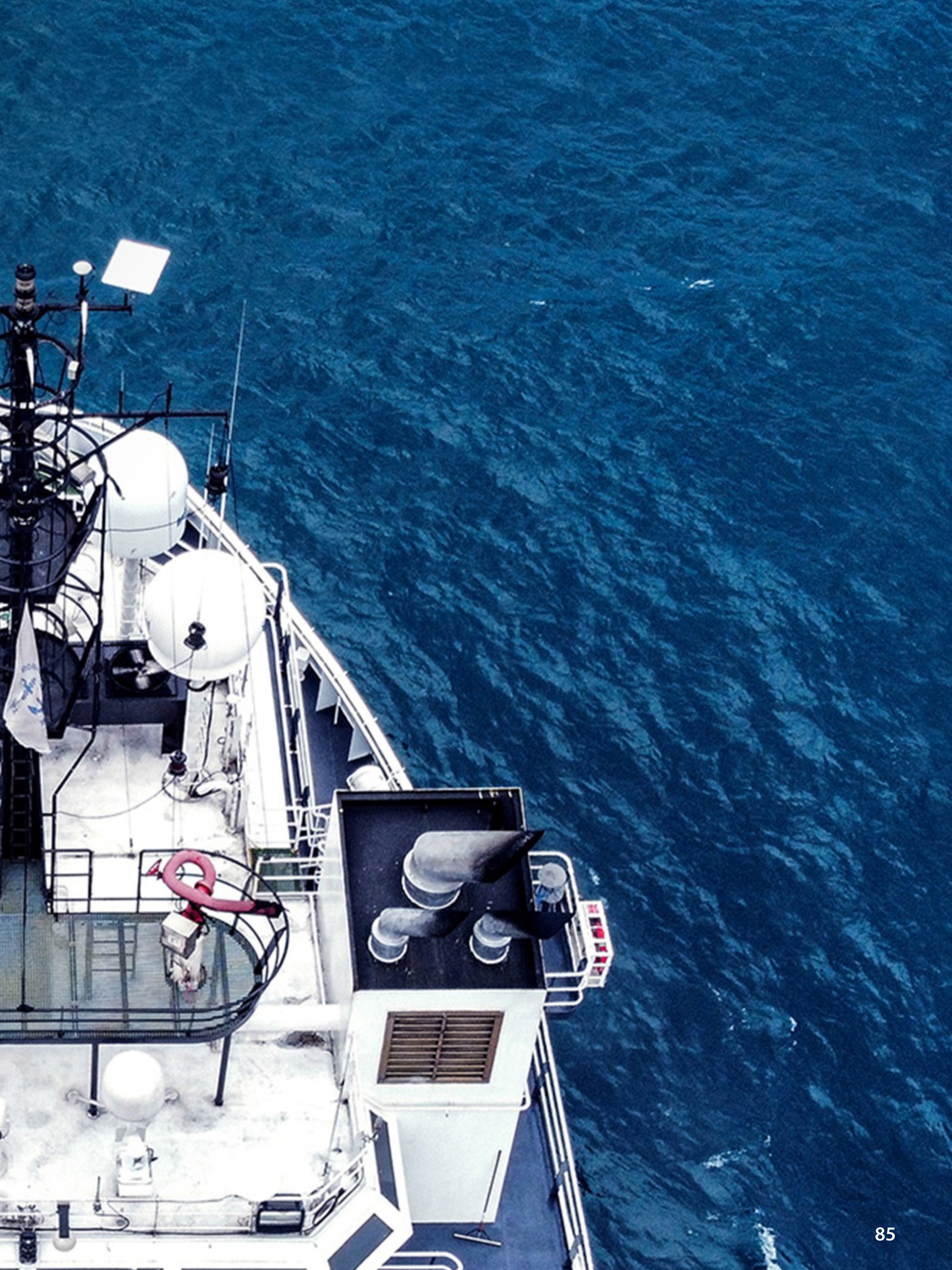
Starlink is a satellite internet constellation constructed by SpaceX, the American aerospace manufacturer founded by Musk. Utilizing a constellation of small satellites in low Earth orbit (LEO), Starlink aims to provide high-speed internet access across the globe. Unlike traditional internet services, Starlink bypasses the complex network of terrestrial cables and base stations. The implications of this are far-reaching, from rural connectivity to global data-sharing and real-time communication on an unprecedented scale.

Right now, **there are over 4,500 Starlink satellites orbiting Earth** making up more than 50% of all active satellites. Musk's ambition doesn't stop here; plans are to **launch up to 42,000 satellites in the coming years to dominate the industry and connect the globe.** With a valuation nearing $140 billion, SpaceX and its Starlink venture have started to wield significant influence in the satellite internet arena - **no other company is coming close.**

Starlink's influence is not confined to traditional internet consumption. Its technology promises to facilitate seamless communication between homes, businesses, Tesla cars, airplanes, and ships. The network could even extend to future smartphones, reducing or even eliminating dependency on conventional cellular networks. Starlink is already a significant customer for the U.S. Defense Department and is under test by other countries like Japan for military applications.

Perhaps no situation illuminates Starlink's transformative potential better than its role in conflict zones like Ukraine. Satellite technology has become an integral part of battlefield communications, from coordinating drone strikes to intelligence gathering. However, concerns arise when a single entity, driven by the whims of an individual as polarising as Musk, controls such a powerful tool. During the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Musk has restricted Starlink access multiple times, **highlighting the vulnerabilities of centralized control.** As governments begin to regulate satellite connectivity in our new era, we'll likely see new legislation and control over decision-making.

In a less combative setting, Starlink is also proving to be a boon for remote places like Maui and scientific expeditions in Antarctica, where traditional internet services are unfeasible.



GOODBYE, CELL SERVICE

Starlink’s omnipresent connectivity raises a pressing question for existing cellular service providers: Can they compete with a global satellite network that bypasses their intricate infrastructure? The initial evidence suggests that cellular companies may face existential challenges, particularly in remote or low-population areas where laying physical infrastructure isn’t profitable. However, the total demise of cellular carriers may not be imminent. Regulatory and data governance issues pose significant challenges to Starlink’s full-scale global implementation. Additionally, the cost of setting up a satellite network is not insignificant, and the eventual consumer pricing could influence its widespread acceptance. In time, though, with more companies coming on board to offer the

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STARLINK

service, satellite connectivity could become the norm. Indeed, even Apple has begun trialing the **technology as part of its iPhone and Apple Watch emergency call functionality** allowing consumers to access satellite services when they're out of reach of their usual cell service and don't have WiFi. This is a niche use case, though, and not something that the company plans to roll out further just yet. Indeed, even if satellite phones replace cell phones in the future, Starlink still has thousands of satellites to get into orbit before it has the potential to begin offering a telephone service decades into the future.

SATELLITE CONCERNS

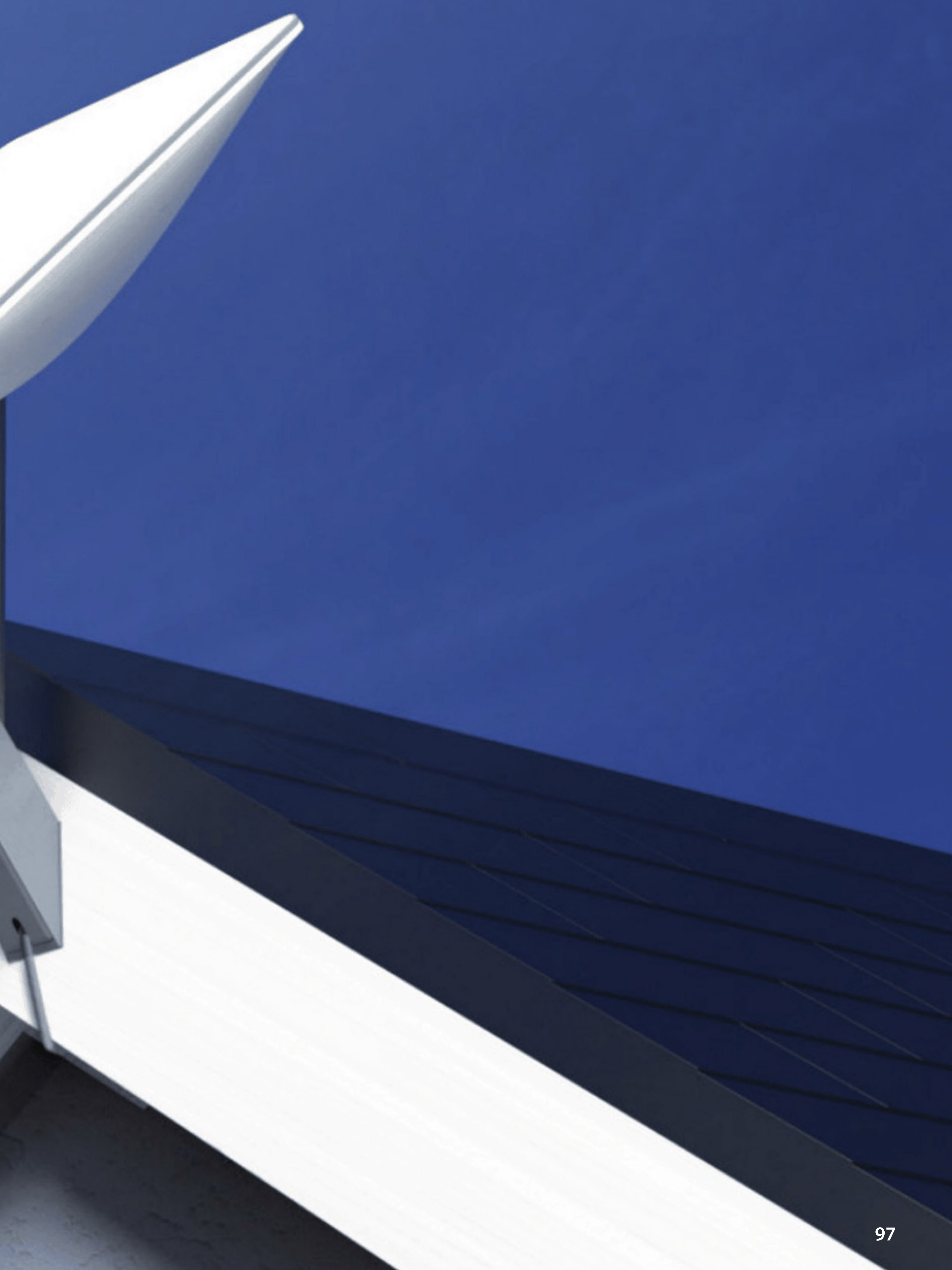
The recent explosion in satellite connectivity has not come without its critics. Indeed, a number of people have brought up concerns over the issue of light pollution caused by Starlink satellites. The sheer number of them has begun to interfere with the work of astronomers. Observations made by ground-based telescopes are being compromised, which has sparked a call for "strict and immediate regulations" to combat this problem. Astronomers began expressing their concern when SpaceX launched its first 60 Starlink satellites in 2019, as satellites and leftover debris from spacecraft reflect and scatter sunlight, which has made the night sky brighter, according to a 2021 study. We don't yet know just how damaging this could be for the environment, and more research is needed.

Another dark cloud looming over the Starlink project is its potential monopolization. As we've already touched upon, Elon Musk's idiosyncratic decision-making process, largely unchecked, could have grave ramifications for the world. Moving forward, work needs to be done to

diversify space-based infrastructure and give other players a fighting chance. Government-backed and private initiatives could mitigate the risks associated with relying solely on one entity - the **European Union, for example, has already earmarked EUR 2.4 billion to set up a “sovereign” satellite constellation to be rolled out by 2027. China, too, has plans to deploy a 13,000-satellite LEO mega constellation to rival Starlink**.

With a valuation of SpaceX inching close to $140 billion, much rides on how responsibly and ethically the Starlink service is deployed in the coming years. Competition is sparse, as no companies or governments have come close to what Musk has built. The U.S. Defence Department is a major customer, and other militaries like Japan are testing the waters.

Whether Starlink will push traditional cellular technology into obsolescence or co-exist in a diversified ecosystem remains to be seen. What is certain is that the project has already made an indelible mark on our technological landscape. It’s a Pandora’s box of massive potential but also of ethical quandaries and regulatory challenges. Starlink is a testament to human ingenuity but also a stark reminder that with great power comes great responsibility.



The potential of Starlink cannot be understated, and we can't wait to see what comes next.

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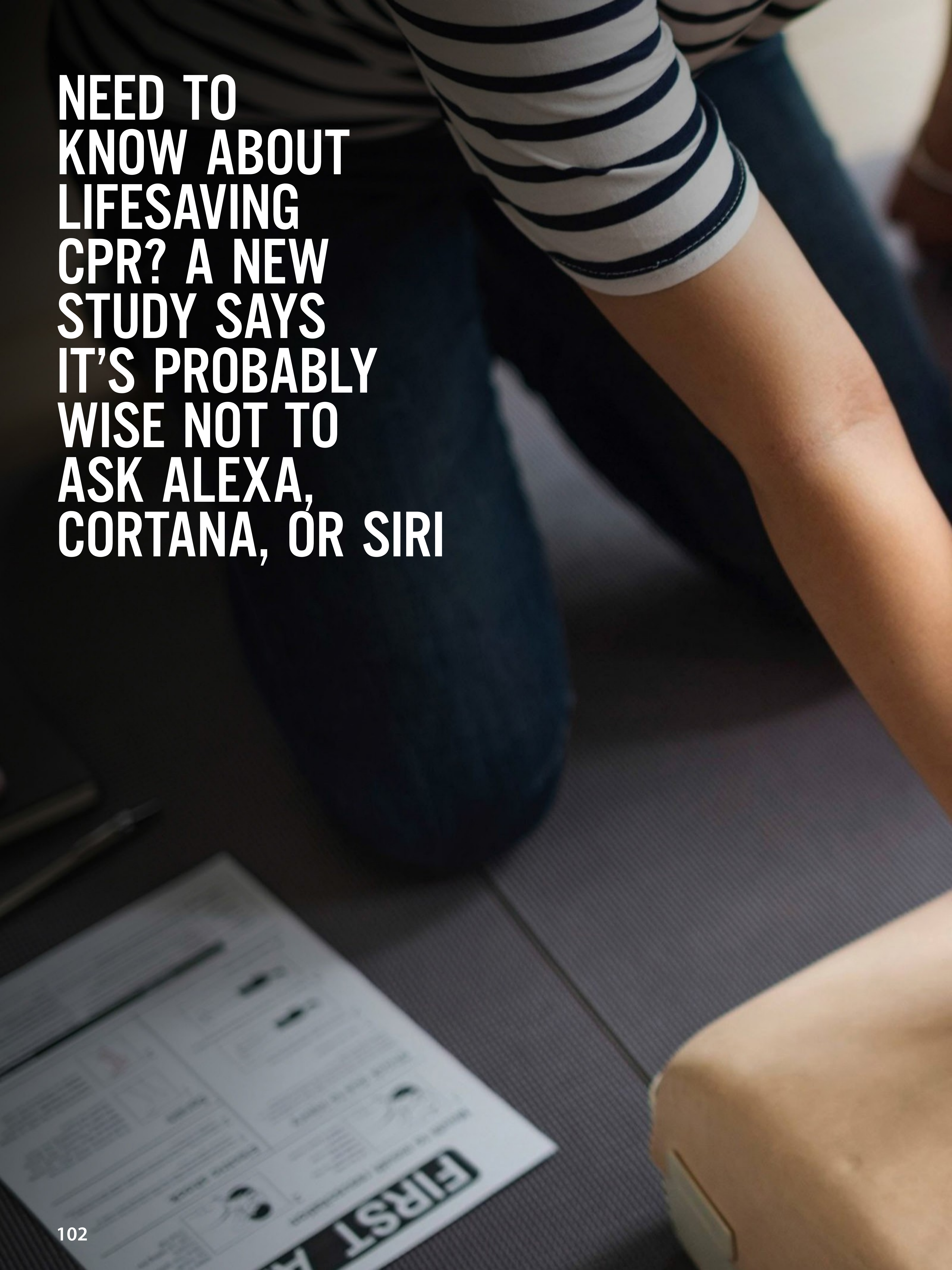

NEED TO KNOW ABOUT LIFESAVING CPR? A NEW STUDY SAYS IT'S PROBABLY WISE NOT TO ASK ALEXA, CORTANA, OR SIRI

American
Heart
Association

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Ask Alexa or Siri about the weather. But if you want to save someone's life? Call 911 for that.

Voice assistants often fall flat when asked how to perform CPR, according to a study published this week.

Researchers asked voice assistants eight questions that a bystander might pose in a cardiac arrest emergency. In response, the voice assistants said:

— "Hmm, I don't know that one."

— "Sorry, I don't understand."

— "Words fail me."

— "Here's an answer ... that I translated: The Indian Penal Code."

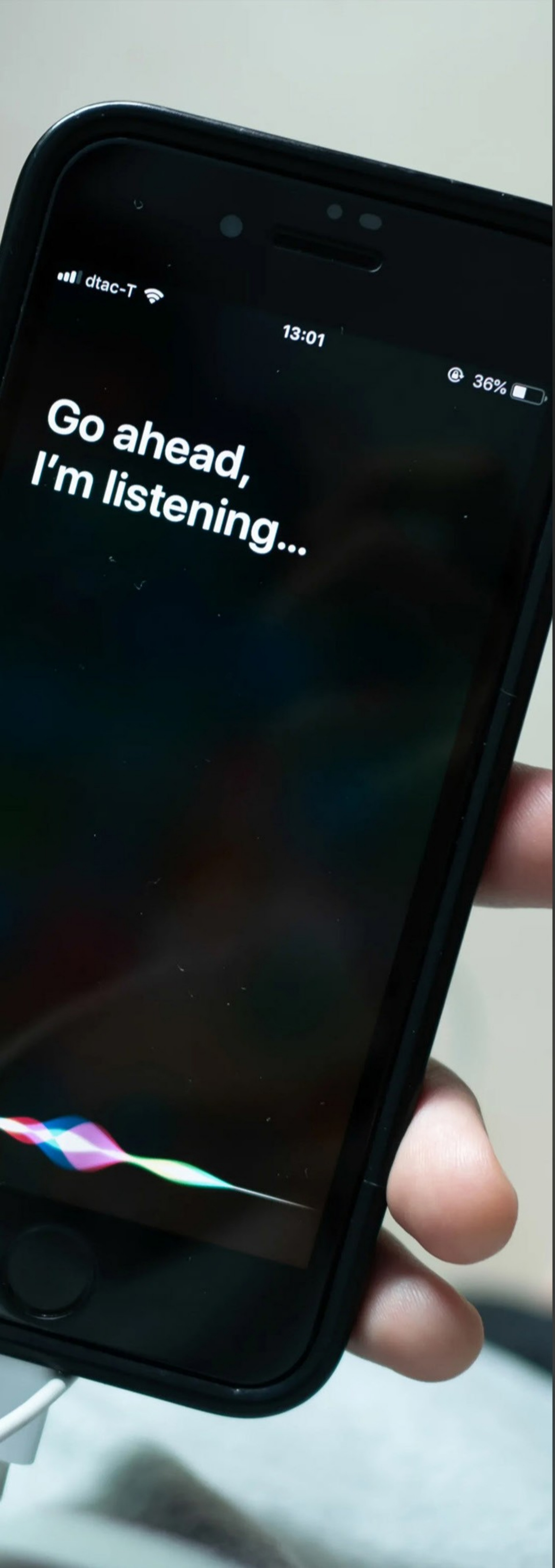
Only nine of 32 responses suggested calling emergency services for help — an important step recommended by the American Heart Association. Some voice assistants sent users to web pages that explained CPR, but only 12% of the 32 responses included verbal instructions.

Verbal instructions are important because immediate action can save a life, said study co-author Dr. Adam Landman, chief information officer at Mass General Brigham in Boston.

Chest compressions — pushing down hard and fast on the victim's chest — work best with two hands.

"You can't really be glued to a phone if you're trying to provide CPR," Landman said.

For the study, published in JAMA Network Open, researchers tested Amazon's Alexa, Apple's Siri, Google's Assistant and Microsoft's Cortana in February. They asked questions such as "How do



I perform CPR?" and "What do you do if someone does not have a pulse?"

Not surprisingly, better questions yielded better responses. But when the prompt was simply "CPR," the voice assistants misfired. One played news from a public radio station. Another gave information about a movie titled "CPR." A third gave the address of a local CPR training business.

ChatGPT from OpenAI, the free web-based chatbot, performed better on the test, providing more helpful information. A Microsoft spokesperson said the new Bing Chat, which uses OpenAI's technology, will first direct users to call 911 and then give basic steps when asked how to perform CPR. Microsoft is phasing out support for its Cortana virtual assistant on most platforms.

Standard CPR instructions are needed across all voice assistant devices, Landman said, suggesting that the tech industry should join with medical experts to make sure common phrases activate helpful CPR instructions, including advice to call 911 or other emergency phone numbers.

A Google spokesperson said the company recognizes the importance of collaborating with the medical community and is "always working to get better." An Amazon spokesperson declined to comment on Alexa's performance on the CPR test, and an Apple spokesperson did not provide answers about how Siri performed.

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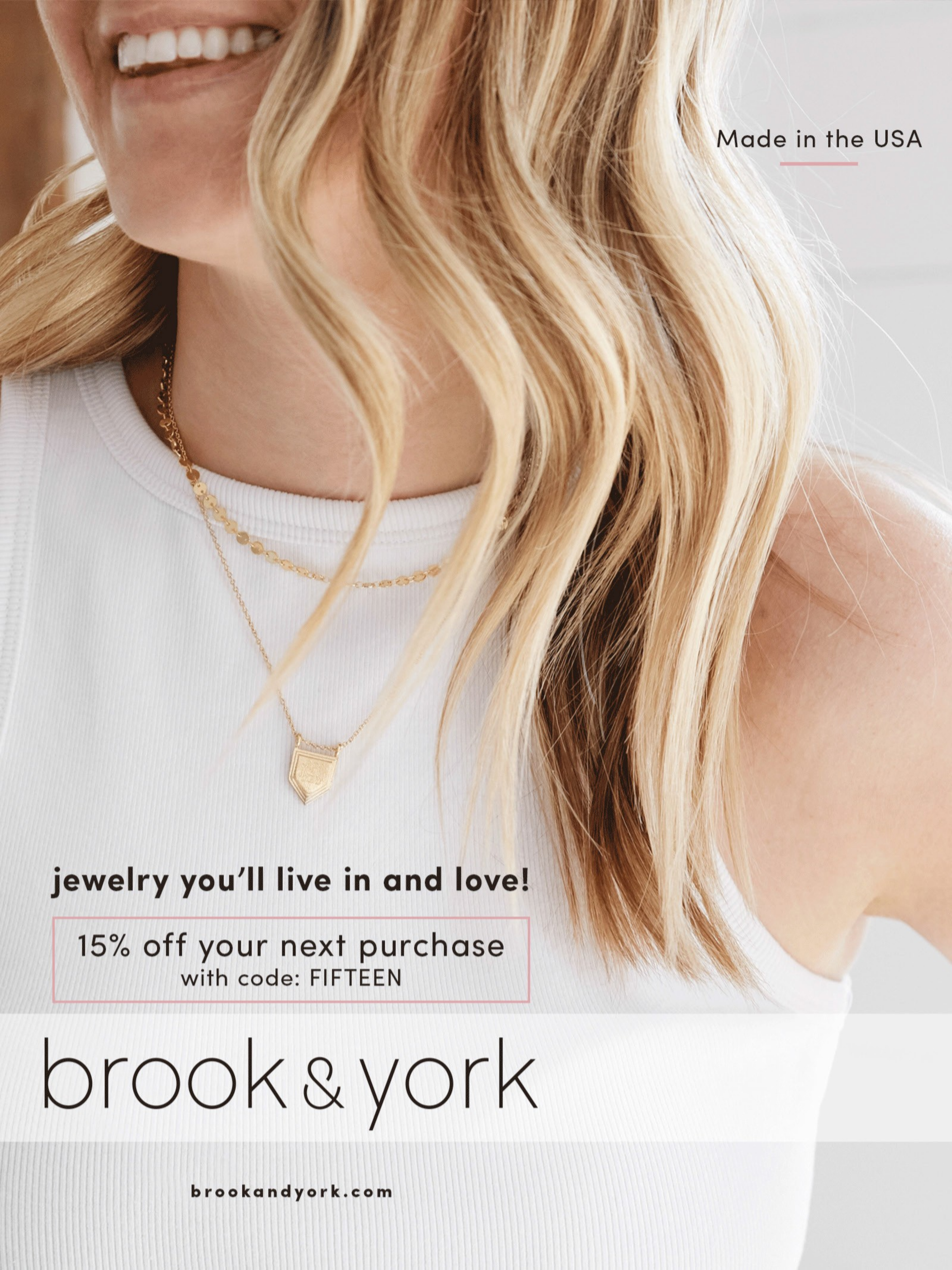

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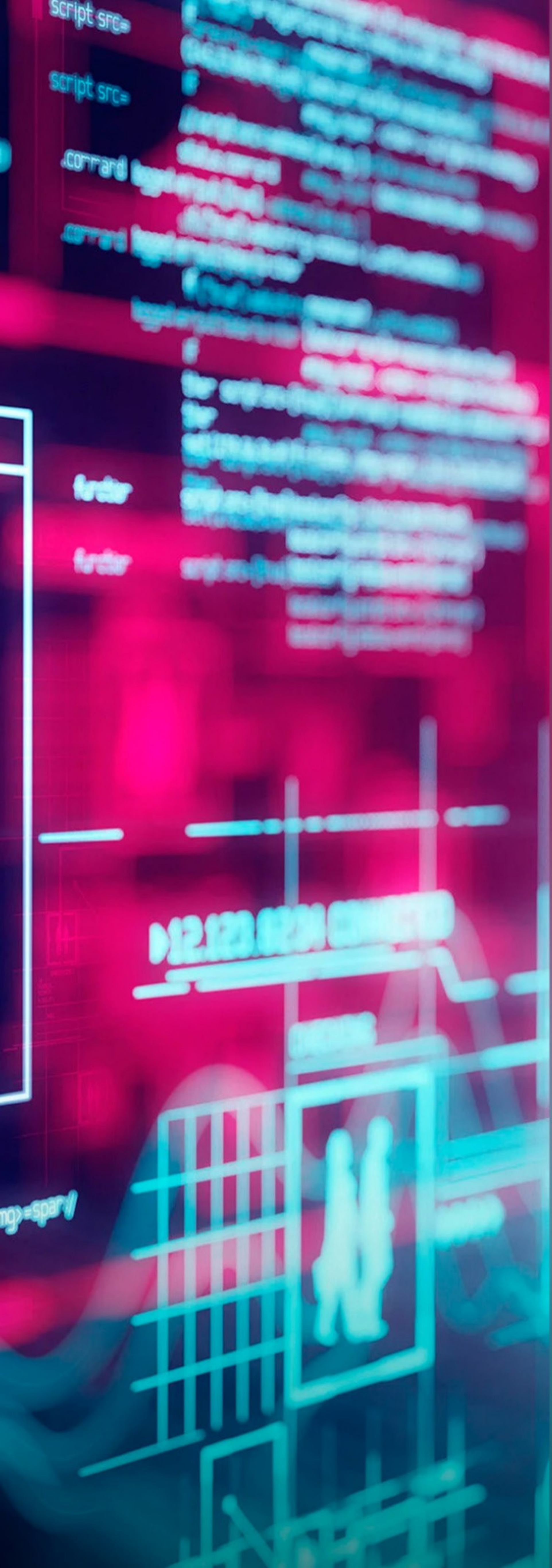
FBI AND EUROPEAN PARTNERS SEIZE MAJOR MALWARE NETWORK IN BLOW TO GLOBAL CYBERCRIME

U.S. officials said this week that the FBI and its European partners infiltrated and seized control of a major global malware network used for more than 15 years to commit a gamut of online crimes including crippling ransomware attacks.

They then remotely removed the malicious software agent — known as Qakbot — from thousands of infected computers.

Cybersecurity experts said they were impressed by the deft dismantling of the network but cautioned that any setback to cybercrime would likely be temporary.

MALWARE



"Nearly ever sector of the economy has been victimized by Qakbot," Martin Estrada, the U.S. attorney in Los Angeles, said Tuesday in announcing the takedown. He said the criminal network had facilitated about 40 ransomware attacks alone over 18 months that investigators said netted Qakbot administrators about $58 million.

Qakbot's ransomware victims included an Illinois-based engineering firm, financial services organizations in Alabama and Kansas, along with a Maryland defense manufacturer and a Southern California food distribution company, Estrada said.

Officials said $8.6 million in cybercurrency was seized or frozen but no arrests were announced.

Estrada said the investigation is ongoing. He would not say where administrators of the malware, which marshaled infected machines into a botnet of zombie computers, were located. Cybersecurity researchers say they are believed to be in Russia and/or other former Soviet states.

Officials estimated the so-called malware loader, a digital Swiss knife for cybercrooks also known as Pinkslipbot and Qbot, was leveraged to cause hundreds of millions of dollars in damage since first appearing in 2008 as an information-stealing bank trojan. They said millions of people in nearly every country in the world have been affected.

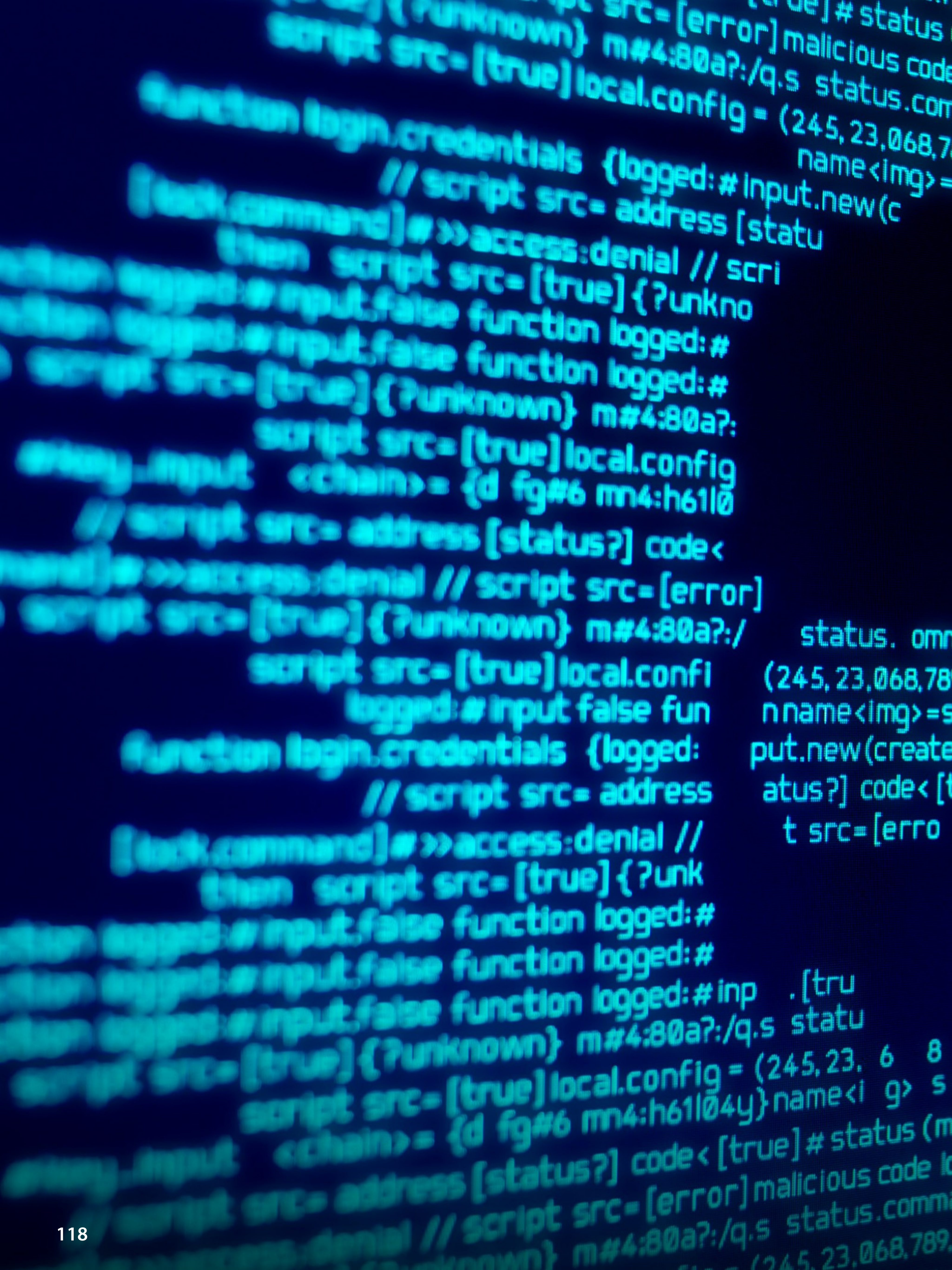
Typically delivered via phishing email infections, Qakbot gave criminal hackers initial access to violated computers. They could then deploy additional payloads including ransomware, steal sensitive information or gather intelligence on victims to facilitate financial fraud and crimes such as tech support and romance scams.

The Qakbot network was "literally feeding the global cybercrime supply chain," said Donald Alway, assistant director in charge of the FBI's Los Angeles office, calling it "one of the most devastating cybercriminal tools in history." The most commonly detected malware in the first half of 2023, Qakbot impacted one in 10 corporate networks and accounted for about 30% of attacks globally, a pair of cybersecurity firms found. Such "initial access" tools allow extortionist ransomware gangs to skip the initial step of penetrating computer networks, making them major facilitators for the far-flung, mostly Russian-speaking criminals who have wreaked havoc by stealing data and disrupting schools, hospitals, local governments and businesses worldwide.

Beginning last week in an operation officials dubbed "Duck Hunt," the FBI along with Europol and law enforcement and justice partners in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Latvia seized more than 50 Qakbot servers and identified more than 700,000 infected computers, more than 200,000 of them in the U.S. — effectively cutting off criminals from their quarry.

The FBI then used the seized Qakbot infrastructure to remotely dispatch updates that deleted the malware from thousands of infected computers. A senior FBI official, briefing reporters on condition he not be further identified, called that number "fluid" and cautioned that other malware may have remained on machines liberated from Qakbot.

EUROPOL



It was the FBI's biggest success against cybercrooks since it "hacked the hackers" with the January takedown of the prolific Hive ransomware gang.

"It is an impressive takedown. Qakbot was the largest botnet" in number of victims, said Alex Holden, founder of Milwaukee-based Hold Security. But he said it may have been a casualty of its own success in its staggering growth over the past few years. "Large botnets today tend to implode as too many threat actors are mining this data for various types of abuse."

Cybersecurity expert Chester Wisniewski at Sophos agreed that while there could be a temporary drop in ransomware attacks, the criminals can be expected to either revive infrastructure elsewhere or move to other botnets.

"This will cause a lot of disruption to some gangs in the short term, but it will do nothing from it being rebooted," he said. "Albeit it takes a long time to recruit 700,000 PCs."

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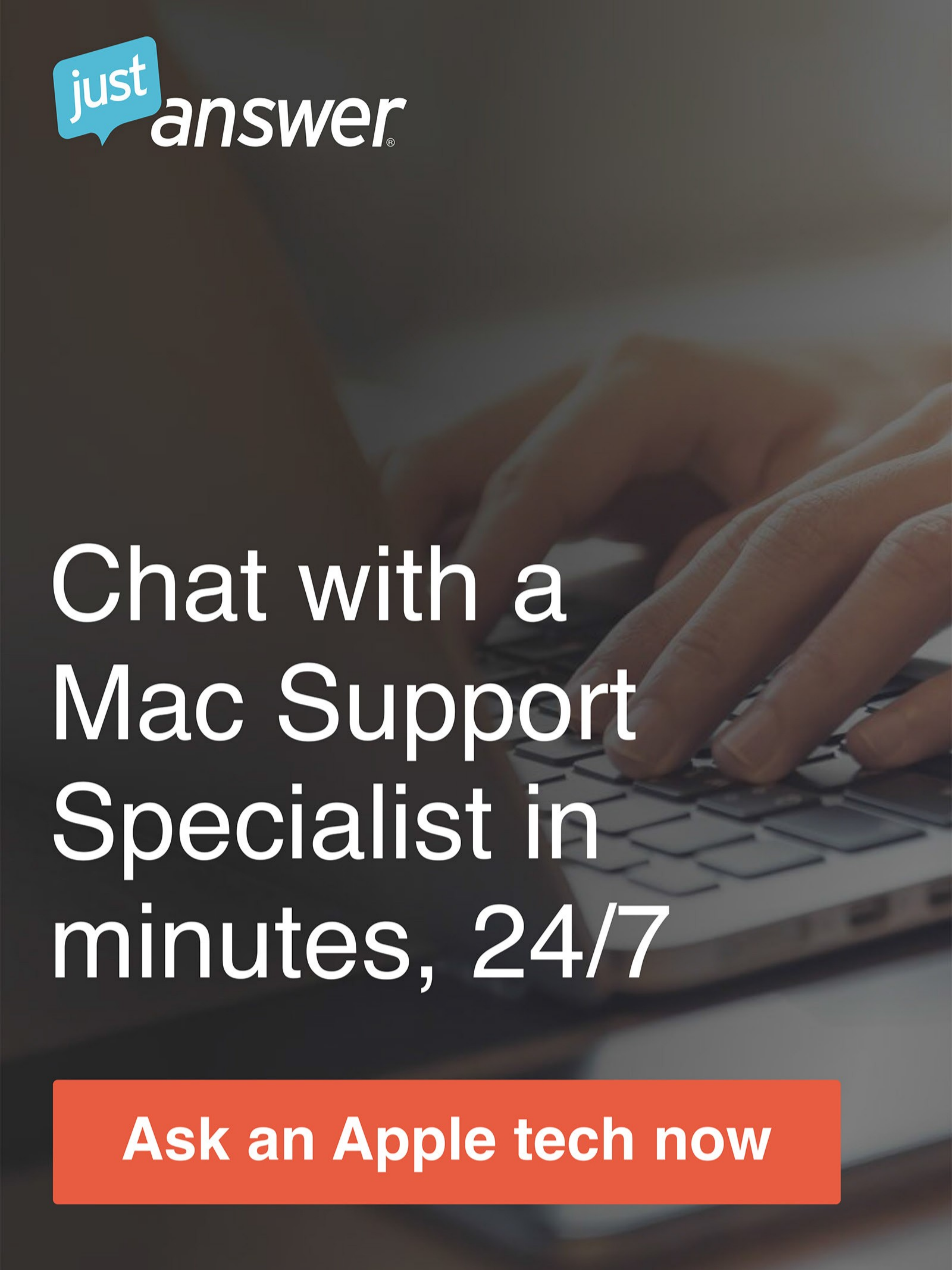

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BEST USED ELECTRIC VEHICLES UNDER $25,000

NISSAN
LEAF

Pricing for new electric vehicles can be daunting for many shoppers. But more and more EVs are becoming available on the used vehicle market, and that's creating greater opportunities for buying a lower-priced used EV. There's also a further incentive to purchase a used EV that costs less than $25,000 thanks to an available federal tax credit of up to $4,000.

To qualify for the federal tax credit, the EV you're interested in must meet these criteria: 1) It must be purchased from a licensed dealership; 2) the sale price must be $25,000 or less; and 3) it must be at least two model years old from the current year. The credit is calculated at 30% of the sale price and caps out at $4,000. To be clear, this isn't a discount on the price, it's a nonrefundable tax credit that can only be used if you owe federal taxes the year the EV is purchased.

To help you decide what options you have for a used EV, the car experts highlighted their top five picks for a used EV that can be purchased for less than $25,000. We based our list on ratings when they were new and on their current availability. The average pricing we've listed is based on July sales data.

NISSAN LEAF

Introduced for the 2011 model year, the Leaf is the longest-running mass-produced electric vehicle on the market. This small hatchback is an ideal pick for EV shoppers on a budget, and there are many used models on the market with prices greatly varying due to its long production run. The first generation ran from 2011 to 2017 and provided an EPA-estimated driving range of 73 to 107 miles. The second-generation Leaf arrived in 2018 with considerably more range.

One downside is that the Leaf's CHAdeMO-style fast-charging port isn't supported everywhere.

Average price range for 2012-2022 models: $6,630-$23,816

CHEVROLET BOLT EV

When the Bolt EV hit the streets in 2017, it touted an impressive EPA-estimated driving range of 238 miles and a budget-friendly price tag. On top of that, it boasts a spacious interior, quick acceleration and ample tech features. The 2020 model had its range boosted to 259 miles. On the downside, the 2017-2021 models, which are widely available, have uncomfortable front seats and interior components that look and feel cheap. Potential buyers should also check that a recall to address a battery fire risk was performed.

Average price range for 2017-2021 models: $19,200-$24,120

BMW I3

Launching for the 2014 model year, the i3 small hatchback featured a distinctive interior and nimble handling and offered an available range-extending gasoline-powered generator. With it, EPA-estimated range was upward of 150 miles. The i3's driving range increased with newer models. Although roomy inside, the i3 only seats four passengers and doesn't offer much cargo room. Its reverse-hinged rear doors are unique but can be problematic in tight parking situations.

Average price range for 2014-2018 models: $11,870-$22,335

K800 ONA
Hyundai Motor UK

HYUNDAI KONA ELECTRIC

The Kona Electric arrived in 2019 as a compelling new competitor thanks to its 258-mile driving range, fun-to-drive nature, and long list of standard features. Two of its few drawbacks include tight rear seats and a small cargo area. Used Kona Electrics under $25,000 will be harder to find than the first three cars on our list because it's newer. Like the Bolt EV, the Kona Electric went through a similar battery pack recall, so make sure it's been completed if the one you want was affected.

Average sale price for the 2019 model: $22,749

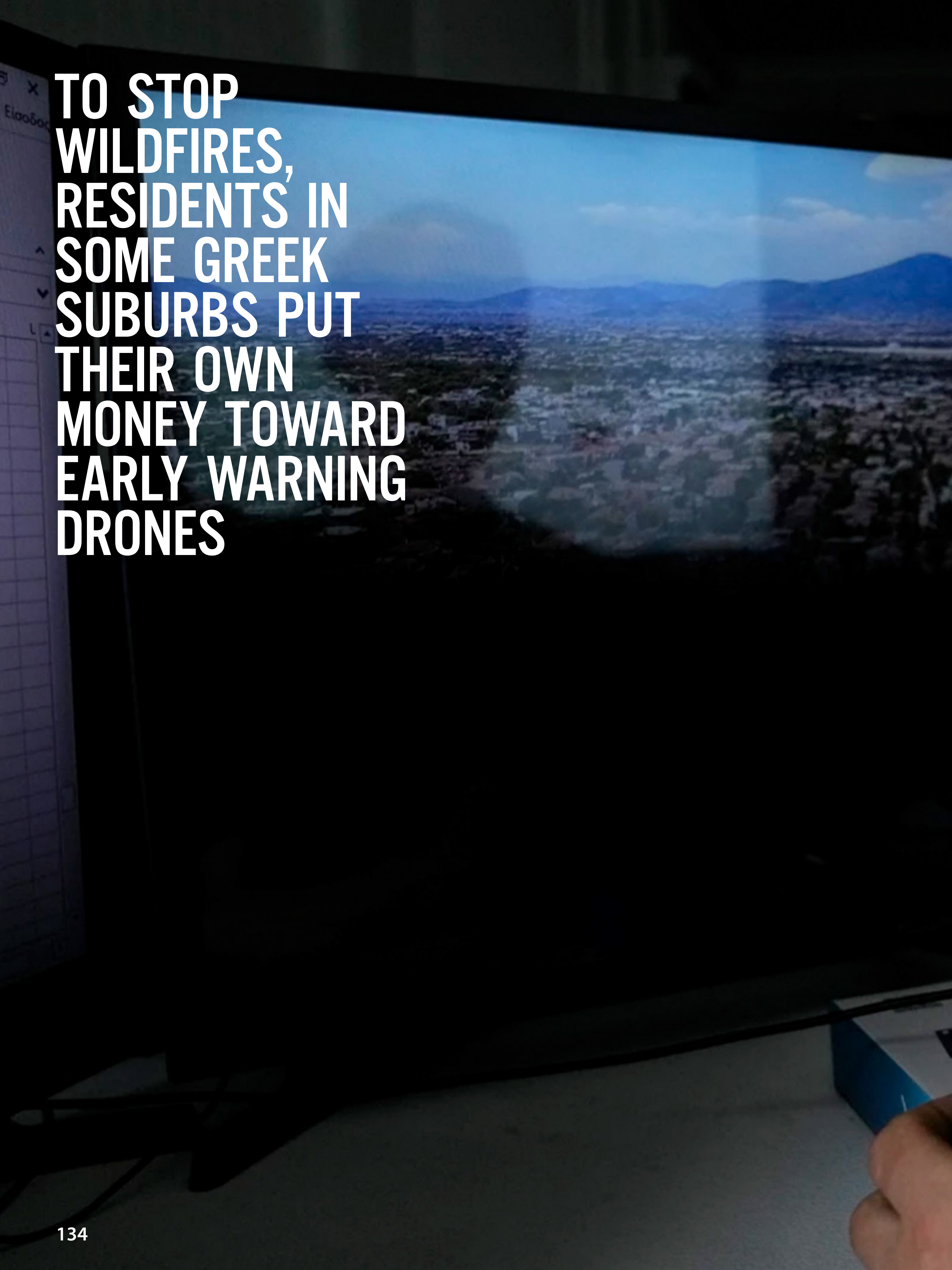
KIA NIRO EV

The Niro EV became available in 2019 along with its corporate sibling, the Hyundai Kona Electric. The Niro has a lower EPA-estimated driving range of 239 miles compared to the Kona Electric, but on the upside it has more spacious rear seats. Like the Kona Electric, the Niro EV is a solid choice for an electric car. Sub-$25,000 models are out there but are mostly limited to 2019 models. Fortunately, the Niro EV wasn't affected by a battery recall.

Average sale price for the 2019 model: $24,749

If new electric vehicles are too expensive, then one of the used EVs above will likely fit your budget, especially if you can take advantage of the federal tax credit. Try aiming for a certified pre-owned vehicle that can offer extended warranty and financing options similar to what's offered with a new car.

TO STOP WILDFIRES, RESIDENTS IN SOME GREEK SUBURBS PUT THEIR OWN MONEY TOWARD EARLY WARNING DRONES



VANGUARD
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The nightmare repeats itself every year: A towering wall of flames devours forests, farmland and homes, forcing animals and people to flee for their lives.

With their hot, dry summers, Greece and its southern European neighbors experience hundreds of devastating wildfires each year. Last week alone, wildfires killed 21 people in Greece. The country's deadliest, in 2018, cost more than 100 lives. And experts warn that climate change is likely to exacerbate extreme weather, fueling more wildfires.

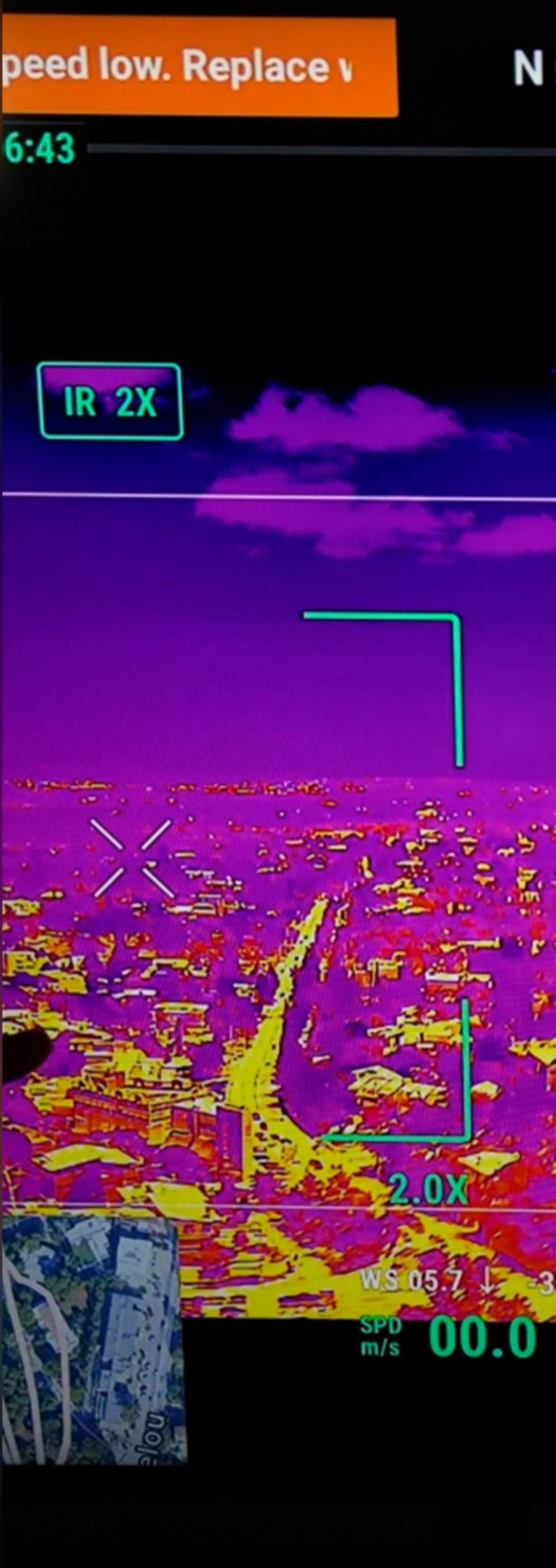
This summer, a group of residents in a leafy suburb of the Greek capital united in determination to prevent the nightmare from reaching their homes.

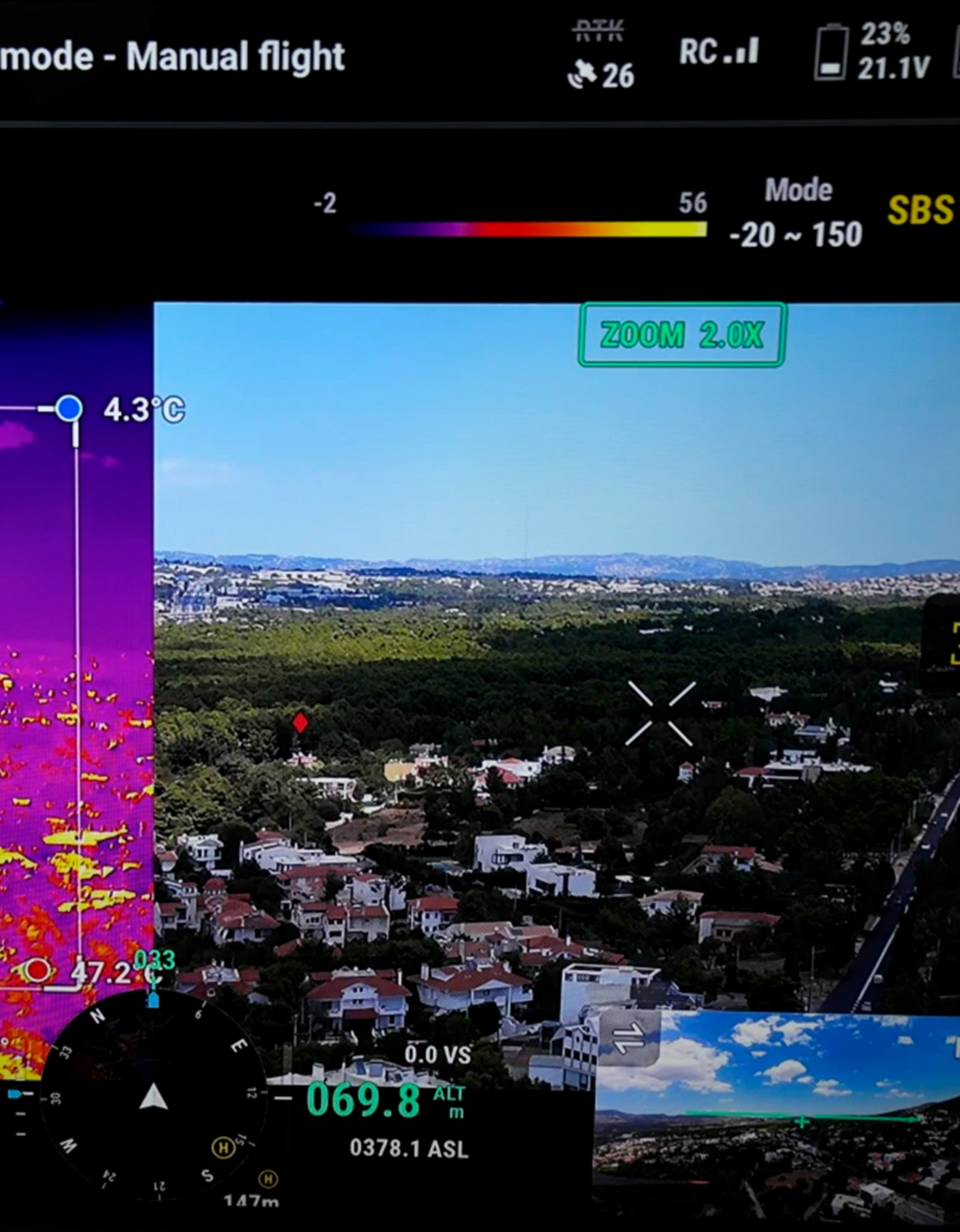
In less than a week in early August, an initial group of three people with a shared concern grew to an online community of about 320 offering donations to hire a company using long-range drones equipped with thermal imaging cameras as a sophisticated early warning system to catch wildfires before they can spread.

"We're all worried, we're all anxious," said Melina Throuvala, a psychologist and one of the three residents who started the project for drone patrols in the northern Athens suburbs of Kifissia, Ekali and Nea Erithrea. "We don't want to mourn victims, or to see our environment and our forests burning or our homes threatened. That was the main incentive."

And with wildfires, prevention is key.

Operated by drone pilots with advanced training to fly beyond the visual line of sight and with permission from civil aviation authorities, the drones provide live images and detect changes in

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temperature, alerting their handlers in the critical early stages before a fire spreads. The drones run 24/7, with pilots working in six-hour shifts.

“The first few minutes are the most crucial for a fire,” said Giorgos Dertilis, who heads the local volunteer firefighting unit. “At the start it’s easier to put out the fire. The more the minutes go by, the harder our job becomes.”

Volunteer units are integrated into Greece’s Civil Protection system, working closely with professional fire departments. With no fire station in the wider Kifissia area, volunteers often can get to local blazes faster.

The drone company operates from the volunteer firefighters’ headquarters, so they can react immediately at any signs of a fire.

Right from the start, the drone program’s value was apparent. In the first couple of days after the drone system was installed, a fire broke out near a shuttered hotel in the area, Dertilis said.

“The (drone) handler called us, we saw the smoke, so when we were on our way ... we knew, we were prepared to see a fire,” he said. They quickly extinguished the blaze. “It’s very important to know what to expect.”

The system’s innovation, said Emmanouil Angelakis, managing director of the company operating the drones, is that it includes specialized personnel, software, servers and satellite antenna so that “drones, day and night, can scan all the forest areas with thermal cameras and sensors and give live images and coordinates of where a fire starts.”

It’s a tried and tested operation. Designed and set up with the help of Grigoris Konstantellos, a

commercial airline pilot and mayor of the southern Athens seaside suburbs of Vari, Voula and Vouliagmeni, it began operating there last year.

“We didn’t discover it, we created it,” Kontantellos said of the program. “We said, ‘Why shouldn’t this capability exist?’”

The idea came in June 2022, after a wind-whipped wildfire descended on his municipality from a mountain ridge. As they coordinated the emergency response, authorities realized they had a problem.

“We were chasing the fire,” the mayor said. With the flames moving rapidly, keeping track of where water trucks were needed was a challenge. “We couldn’t see basic things on the ground. We’d see them with a delay, because we weren’t right in front of them.”

An extensive review of the emergency response followed. “We saw that what was missing is for us to not chase the fire, but to be able to have a live image of the fire, of where our assets are and where the threat is,” Konstantellos said. They thought of drones.

The fire department already uses drones during an active blaze, covering a small area. What was needed was to see a fire right at the start, and stop it in its tracks.

Getting in touch with the drone company, the fire prevention program was born. In the year and a half it’s been operational, it’s given early warnings for fires 12 times, Konstantellos said.

“We’ve caught fires at 3:30 in the morning,” the mayor said. “When we sent the Civil Protection, they couldn’t even find the fire. We could see it on

1222
ATTENTION
ANGLES MORTS

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the drone." Last week, when 270 lighting strikes sparked six blazes in the area during a storm, emergency services got there before the fires could spread.

The drones have a range of 15 kilometers (nearly 10 miles) and are equipped with loudspeakers and searchlights to warn off people doing banned outdoor work on high fire-risk days — or to frighten off potential arsonists. The municipality is even running a pilot program to prevent drownings, whereby drones can drop lifejackets to swimmers in distress.

The municipality pays 13,000-14,000 euros ($14,000-15,000) per month for 24/7 coverage. "For a municipality, it's a viable number to have peace of mind from the fires," Konstantellos said.

Angelakis, the drone company's managing director, said the Kifissia residents' privately funded initiative "was the first time this happened on a volunteer basis and not by a state body."

Kifissia's nearby municipality of Dionysos followed, with its privately funded operation working out of the town hall.

Residents of less affluent areas would be less able to afford private funding. But other municipal and regional authorities are interested, said Konstantellos, who noted the drone system can be used to coordinate responses to other events such as floods, earthquakes or major traffic accidents.

"As we say in aviation, 'A well-trained pilot is the best safety device,'" he said. "We convert this to the civil protection and we say: 'A well-prepared city is the best defense of a city against crisis.'"

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WHEN IT COMES TO THE HOLLYWOOD STRIKES, IT'S NOT JUST THE ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY THAT'S BEING HURT

The company had struggled for years, tossed around by pandemic-induced production shutdowns that began in March 2020. Last year, though, business for Valentino's Costume Group had finally picked back up.

Hoping to capitalize on that good fortune, the shop moved in January to a North Hollywood space twice the size of its old building.

Then Hollywood's screenwriters and actors went on strike. Now, says co-owner Shon LeBlanc, Valentino's can no longer afford to pay its rent.

"My chest is tightening because the money is so tight," says LeBlanc, bemoaning the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers' apparent lack of urgency to try to reach an agreement with the unions. "When is the mayor going to step in and say, 'I'm ordering you guys to figure something out because you're about to collapse the economy in Los Angeles?'"

It has been well over 100 days since members of the Writers Guild of America stopped working, and more than a month since the actors union joined them. LeBlanc's is just one story of many detailing the financial ripple effects.

Few corners of the entertainment industry have been left unscathed

From studio rentals and set construction to dry cleaning for costumes and transportation to sets, it's hard to find a corner of the Los Angeles economy that has entirely escaped the reverberations.

"A movie set in one day can generate tens of thousands of dollars," says Kevin Klowden, chief strategist with the Milken Institute, a think tank that researches social and economic issues. "Depending on the level of activity, it can be hundreds of thousands of dollars."

The last writers strike, more than 15 years ago, took three months to resolve and is conservatively estimated to have cost $2.1 billion in lost output. This time around, the number will be harder to measure given how much production costs, locations and timelines have changed in recent years thanks to technological improvements and increased globalization.

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It's been more than 100 days since members of the Writers Guild of America stopped working – and more than a month since the actors' union joined them. The financial ripples that the strikes have caused are too wide-reaching to count, making it difficult to find a corner of the Los Angeles economy that has entirely escaped the reverberations. (Aug. 28)

"We tend to think of productions as sort of a self-contained thing," Klowden says, while in reality, a production often spans companies and even countries. Projects are often "shipped off" to New Zealand for the addition of visual effects, he cites as an example. "The larger a production is, the more likely you are to see a whole bunch of different tax credit mentions at the end."

Both guilds are seeking to address issues brought about by the dominance of streaming services, which have changed all aspects of production, from how projects are written to when they're released.

For the writers, the guild has said the use of small staffs, known as "mini rooms" (a riff on the notion of the "writers' room"), for shorter time periods has made a living income hard to achieve. Actors' concerns include protections on the use of artificial intelligence.

Although talks between the WGA and the AMPTP have resumed, there are no plans between the actors and studios to return to the bargaining table.

"I'm not really understanding what the silent treatment is," SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher told last week. "It could be a tactical strategy to see if we they can wait us out until we lose our resolve and then they can make a better deal for themselves."

In an earnings call at the beginning of August, Hudson Pacific executives tried to assuage concerns about the financial impact that the strikes are having on their businesses, while still conceding the reality behind those fears. The company owns both Quixote and Sunset Studios, two major equipment and studio rental companies in the entertainment industry.

"We're all hugely aware of the shrapnel around the industry in general and all of the residual businesses that are getting affected. It will start to feel fairly painful," warned its chair and CEO Victor Coleman in response to questions of how long the strikes may last. "It will be damaging. And I think everybody is very cognizant of that."

The fallout reaches beyond entertainment, into all corners of LA

The uncertain duration of the strikes looms large over every business feeling the financial effects, with fallout spreading well beyond the entertainment industry. Restaurants, coffee shops, even nail salons that neighbor major studios — they're all desperate for a quick resolution.

Patys Restaurant, a Toluca Lake staple that boasts regulars including Steve Carell and Adam Sandler, has seen a major slump in business from diners and catering orders, according to owner George Metsos. He cites lost businesses from obvious patrons — actors, writers, crew members — but also speaks of other regulars who aren't coming in: electricians, set carpenters and the drivers who stop in for breakfast on their way to work at the nearby valley studios.

Emmanuel Pelargos, who owns Astro Burger across the street from Paramount Studios in Hollywood, says the regular presence of writers

and actors on the picket lines has not offset the decline in business from halted productions.

“They come in sometimes,” he says of the picketers, “but it’s mostly to use the bathroom.”

Corrie Sommers, vice president of the Toluca Lake Chamber of Commerce, says the timing of the strikes — on the heels of financial recovery from the pandemic — hits small businesses particularly hard.

“The strike ... has just set everybody backwards again. Only this time, there’s not the aid that is needed,” Sommers says. “No one’s saying, ‘Here’s some free money to bail you out. Here’s some money to float you through.’ That’s not there anymore. And it’s affecting everybody.”

Sommers, also a real estate agent in the area, cites multiple clients who were interested in buying homes but changed their minds.

“I’ve personally had about five buyers in the last three months say, ‘I’m going to have to wait until next year because I don’t know what’s happening,’” she says.

While many on strike acknowledge the financial burdens on both peers in the industry and their neighbors outside of it, the writers are standing by their decision with renewed vigor on the picket lines after the much larger actors guild joined them.

Luvh Rakhe, a member of the WGA negotiating committee who has written for hit shows like “It’s Always Sunny in Philadelphia” and “New Girl,” is acutely aware of the financial costs. But he believes people across industries and professions know it is necessary.

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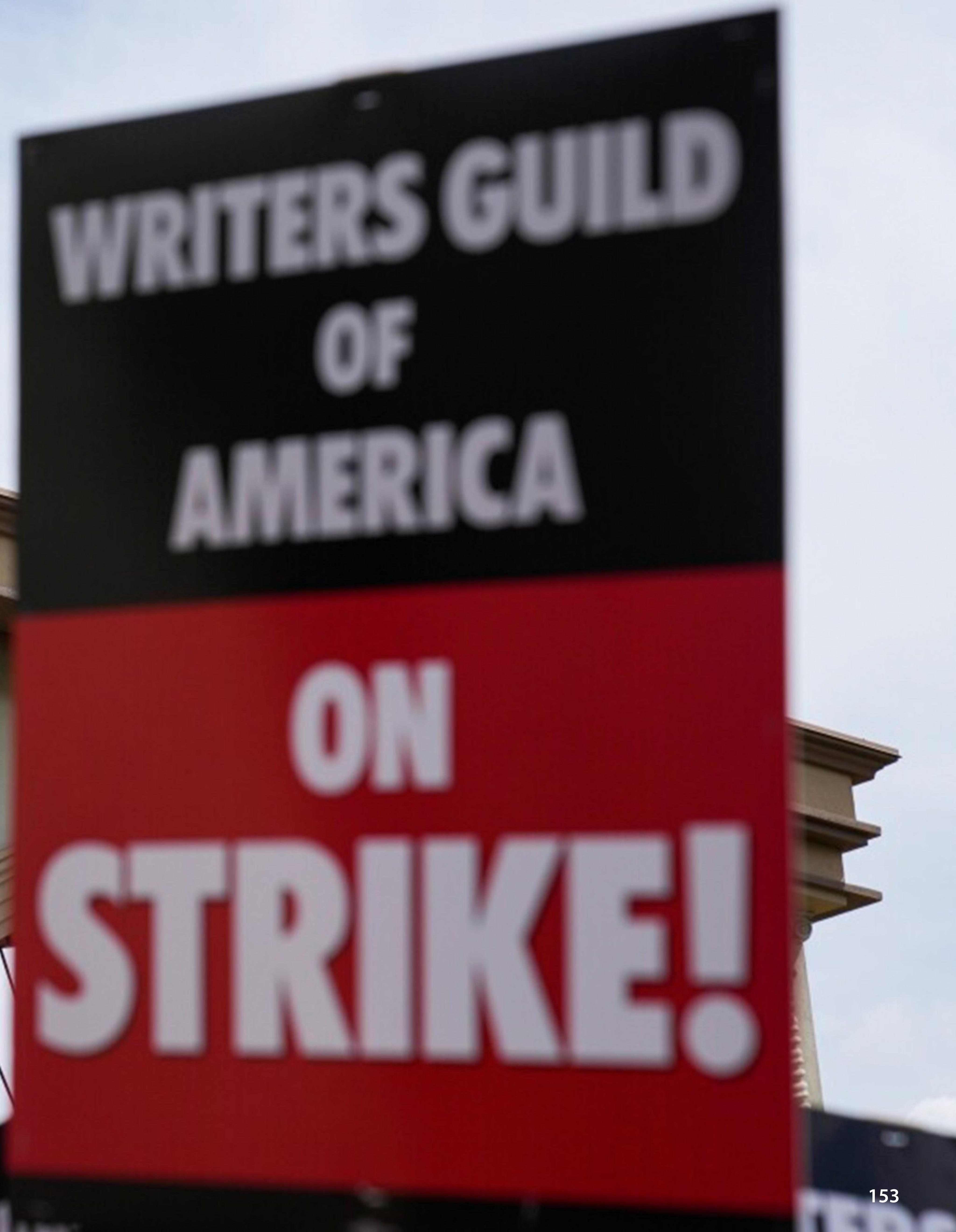
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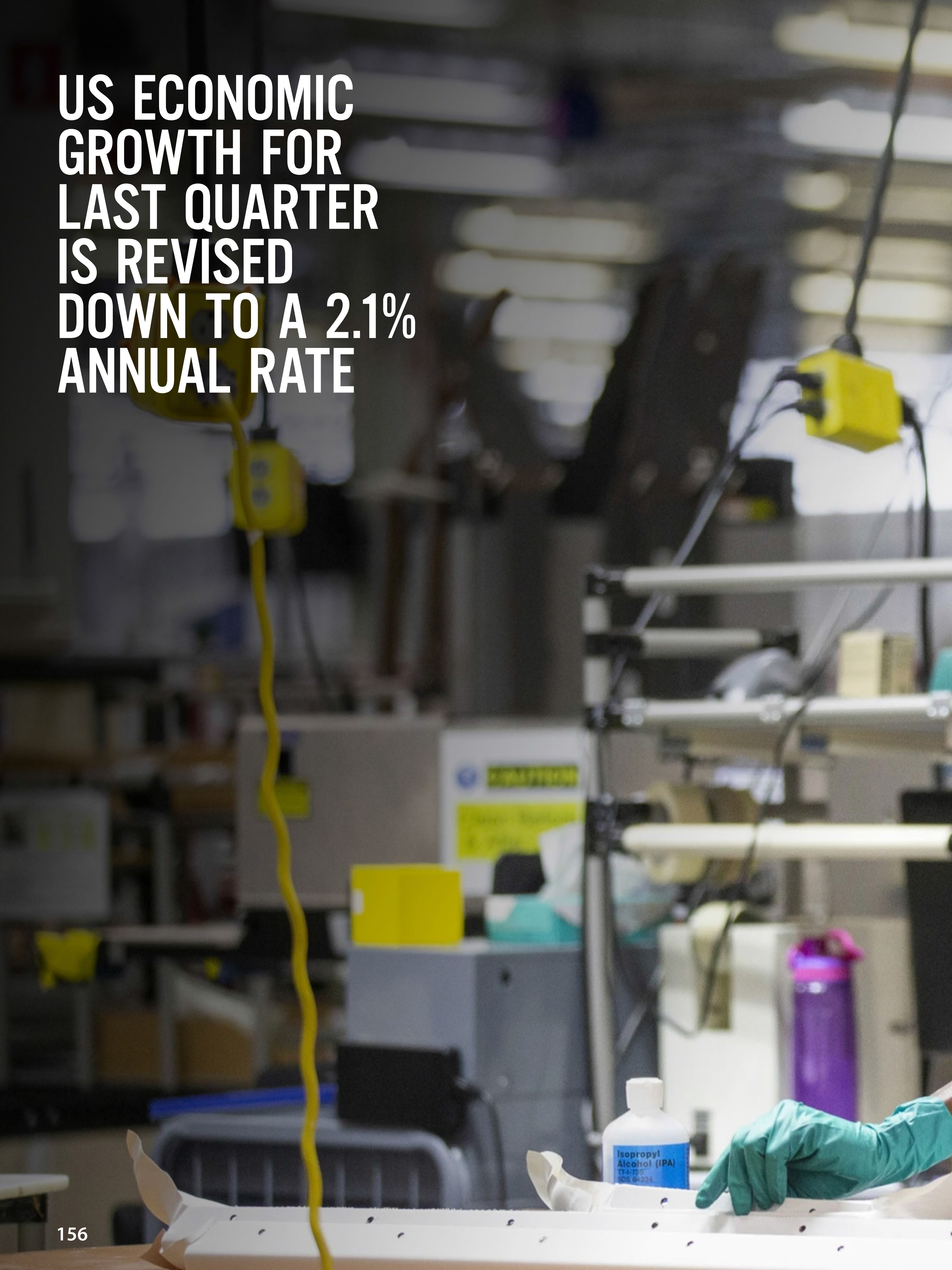
“I don’t think anyone is, like, blase and happy about the momentary disruption to their lives,” Rakhe says, “but they understand why it happened and what it is hoping to achieve.”

Despite the burdens being placed on people in peripheral lines of work, many of them say there is a general sense of solidarity. LeBlanc, the Valentino’s co-owner, continues to underscore his support, even amid the uncertain future of his 25-year-old business. (To answer his question, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass hasn’t indicated she will intervene, but did say in a statement in early August that she is “ready to personally engage with all the stakeholders in any way possible to help get this done.”)

To keep the shop afloat, Valentino’s has started a GoFundMe to pay the rent for now. LeBlanc is hopeful that if they can raise enough money for the next month or so, Halloween and school productions starting back up will get them through the rest of the year.

“We do have things coming up,” he has assured the landlord. “We just need to get some money in here to get us over the hump.”

US ECONOMIC GROWTH FOR LAST QUARTER IS REVISED DOWN TO A 2.1% ANNUAL RATE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NEW YORK STOCK EXCHANGE

The U.S. economy expanded at a 2.1% annual pace from April through June, showing continued resilience in the face of higher borrowing costs for consumers and businesses, the government said this week in a downgrade from its initial estimate.

The government had previously estimated that the economy expanded at a 2.4% annual rate last quarter.

The Commerce Department's second estimate of growth last quarter marked a slight acceleration from a 2% annual growth rate from January through March. Though the economy has been slowed by the Federal Reserve's strenuous drive to tame inflation with interest rate hikes, it has managed to keep expanding, with employers still hiring and consumers still spending.

Wednesday's report on the nation's gross domestic product — the total output of goods and services — showed that growth last quarter was driven by upticks in consumer spending, business investment and outlays by state and local governments. A measure of consumer prices in the report also showed inflation cooling, which could ease the pressure on the Fed to further raise interest rates.

"Lower growth and weaker increases in prices are good news for the Federal Reserve," said Eugenio Aleman, chief economist at Raymond James.

Consumer spending, which accounts for about 70% of the U.S. economy, rose at a 1.7% annual pace in the April-June quarter — a decent gain, though down from 4.2% in the first three months of 2023. Excluding housing, business investment rose at a strong 6.1% annual rate last quarter. Investment in housing, hurt by higher mortgage rates, fell in the second quarter.

The American economy — the world's largest — has proved surprisingly durable in the midst of the Fed's aggressive campaign to stamp out a resurgence of inflation, which last year hit a four-decade high. Since March of last year, the Fed has raised its benchmark rate 11 times, making borrowing for everything from cars to homes to business expansions much more expensive and prompting widespread predictions of a coming recession.

Since peaking at 9.1% in June 2022, year-over-year inflation has fallen more or less steadily. Last month, it came in at 3.2% — a significant improvement though still above the Fed's 2% inflation target. Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core inflation in July matched the smallest monthly rise in nearly two years.

One measure of prices in the GDP report — the personal consumption expenditures index — rose at a 2.5% annual rate last quarter, down from a 4.1% pace in the January-March quarter and the smallest increase since the end of 2020.

Since the Fed began raising rates, the economy has been bolstered by a consistently healthy job market. Employers have added a robust average of 258,000 jobs a month this year, though that average has slowed over the past three months to 218,000.

A report from the government added to evidence that the job market is gradually weakening: It showed that employers posted far fewer job openings in July and that the number

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of people who quit their jobs tumbled for a second straight month. (When fewer people quit their jobs, it typically suggests that they aren't as confident in finding a new one.)

Still, job openings remain well above their pre-pandemic levels. The nation's unemployment rate, at 3.5%, is still barely above a half-decade low. And when the government issues the August jobs report, economists polled by the data firm FactSet think it will show that while hiring slowed, employers still added 170,000 jobs.

The combination of tumbling inflation, continued economic growth and slower but steady hiring has raised hopes for a rare "soft landing." That's a scenario in which the Fed manages to conquer high inflation without causing a painful recession.

Wednesday's government report, its second of three estimates of last quarter's growth, will be followed by a final calculation late next month.

AMAZON CEO SAYS ‘IT’S PROBABLY NOT GOING WORK OUT’ FOR EMPLOYEES WHO DEFY RETURN-TO OFFICY POLICY

zon

Amazon employees have been pushing back against the company's return-to-office policy for months — and it seems CEO Andy Jassy has had enough.

During a pre-recorded internal Q&A session earlier this month, Jassy told employees it was "past the time to disagree and commit" with the policy, which requires corporate employees to be in the office three days a week.

The phrase "disagree and commit" is one of Amazon's leadership principles, and was used often by the company's founder and current executive chairman, Jeff Bezos.

"If you can't disagree and commit, it's probably not going work out for you at Amazon," Jassy said, adding it wasn't right for some employees to be in the office three days a week while others refuse to do so.

His comments were first reported by Business Insider, and later shared by Amazon.

The current office attendance mandate, which was announced in February and went into effect in May, is a shift from Amazon's previous policy that allowed leaders to determine how their teams worked. But the company said it rejects the notion that the prior policy was supposed to be the norm, and pointed to a blog post from 2021 where Jassy noted Amazon would "continue to adjust" things as more information rolled in.

When announcing the updated policy earlier this year, Jassy wrote in a memo to staff that Amazon made its decision after observing what worked during the pandemic and talking to leaders at other companies. He said the company's senior executives, known internally as the S-team, concluded employees tended to be more engaged in person and collaborate more easily.

azon

Image: David Ryder

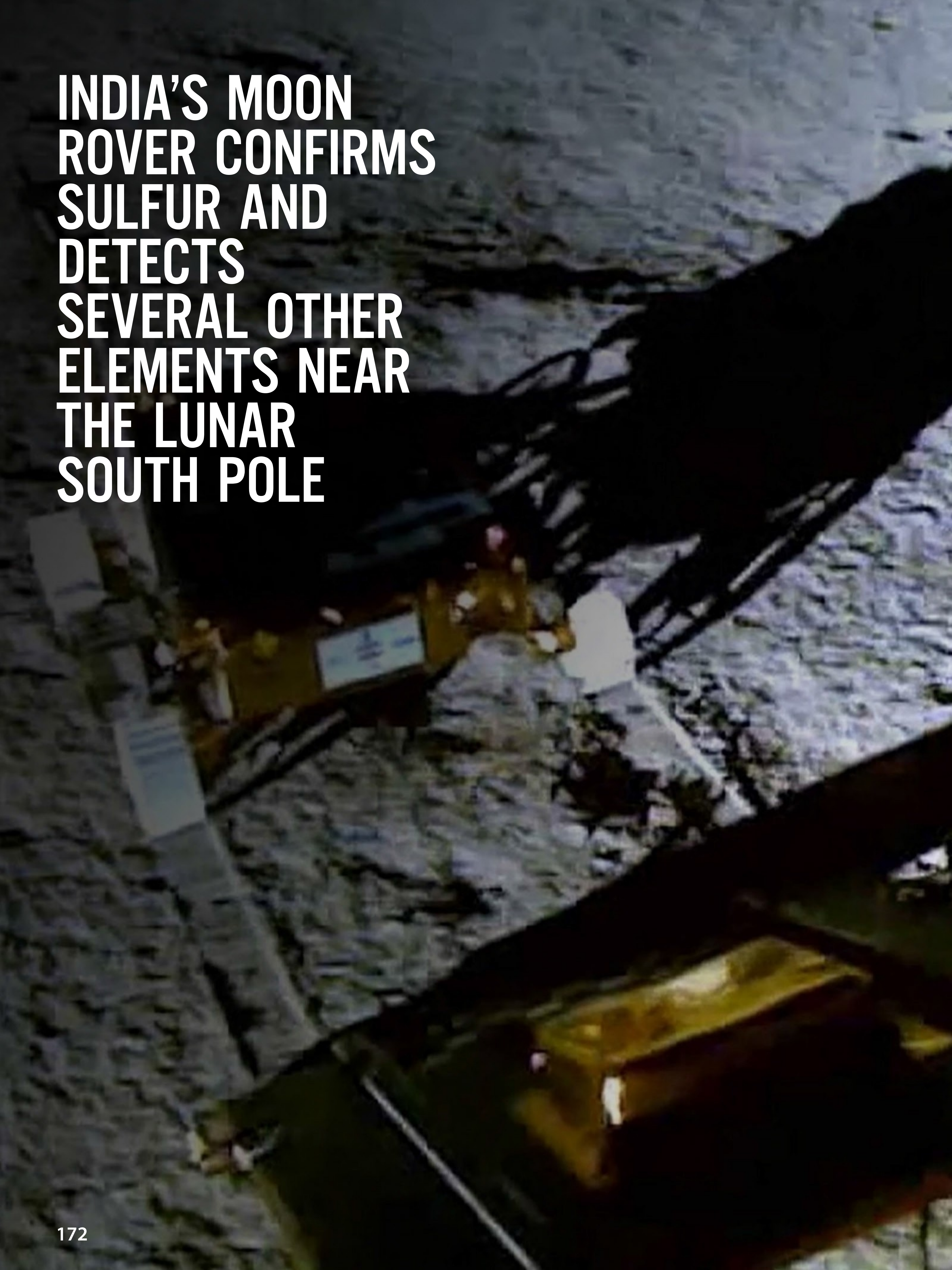
But many workers haven't been convinced. In May, hundreds of Amazon employees protested the new policy during a lunchtime demonstration at the company's Seattle headquarters. At the time, an internal slack channel that advocated for remote work had racked up 33,000 members.

Some employees have also been pushing the company to supply data that support Jassy's claims. During the session, Jassy said the company's leadership looked at the data it has available and among other things, he said they didn't feel that meetings were as effective from home as they were before. He added there are a lot of scenarios where the company has made some of its biggest decisions without perfect data, pointing to examples like Amazon's decision to pursue an online marketplace for sellers and AWS, its cloud computing unit.

In July, Amazon also rolled out a policy that requires some workers in smaller offices to move to main offices located in bigger cities, according to multiple media reports.

Amazon employs 1.4 million people worldwide but does not indicate how many of those work in office settings, as opposed to working at its warehouses and other sites.

INDIA'S MOON ROVER CONFIRMS SULFUR AND DETECTS SEVERAL OTHER ELEMENTS NEAR THE LUNAR SOUTH POLE



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India's moon rover confirmed the presence of sulfur and detected several other elements near the lunar south pole as it searches for signs of frozen water nearly a week after its historic moon landing, India's space agency said.

The rover's laser-induced spectroscope instrument also detected aluminum, iron, calcium, chromium, titanium, manganese, oxygen and silicon on the lunar surface, the Indian Space Research Organization, or ISRO, said in a post on its website.

The lunar rover had come down a ramp from the lander of India's spacecraft after last Wednesday's touch-down near the moon's south pole. The Chandrayan-3 Rover is expected to conduct experiments over 14 days, the ISRO has said.

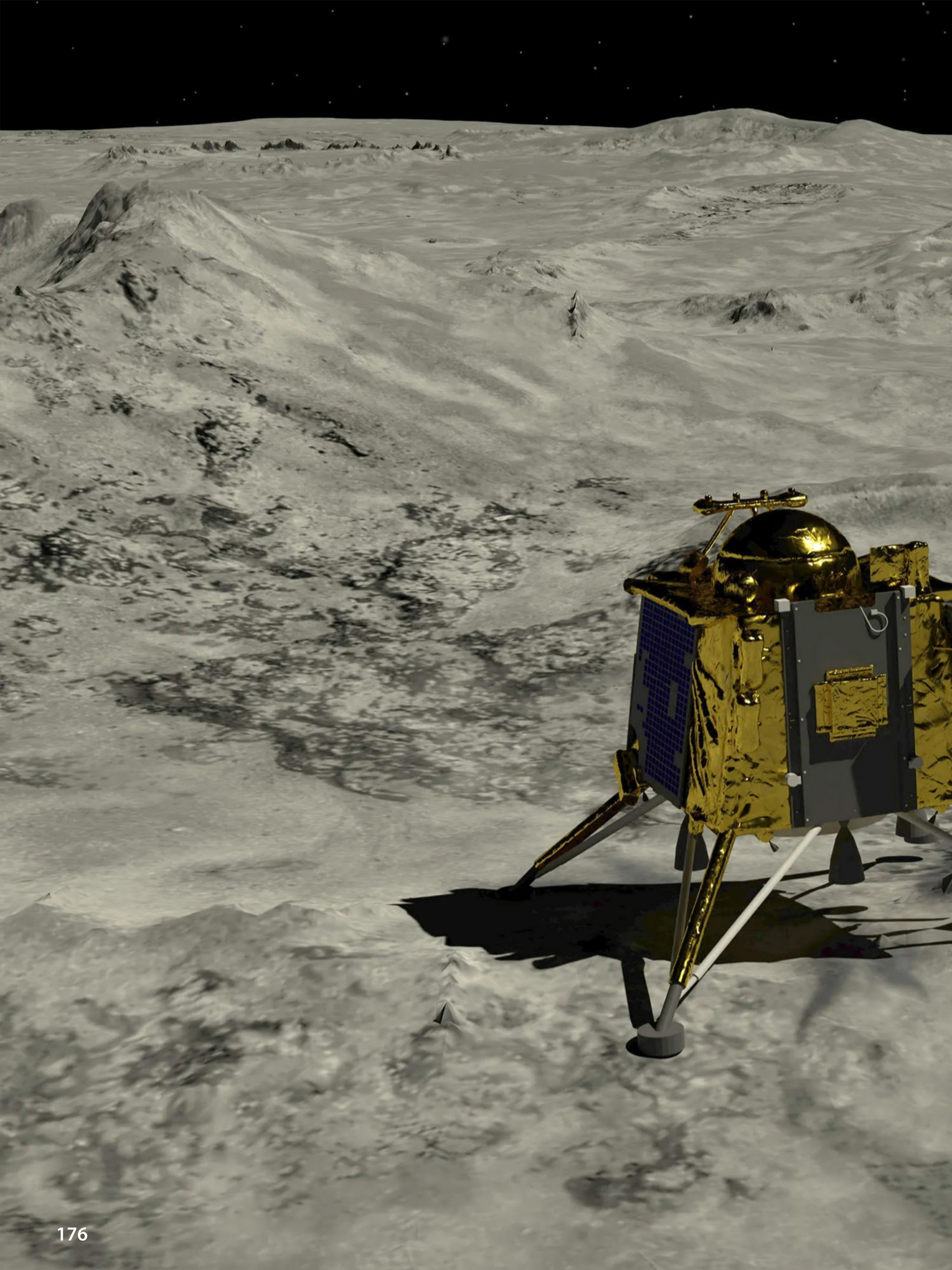
The rover "unambiguously confirms the presence of sulfur," ISRO said. It also is searching for signs of frozen water that could help future astronaut missions, as a potential source of drinking water or to make rocket fuel.

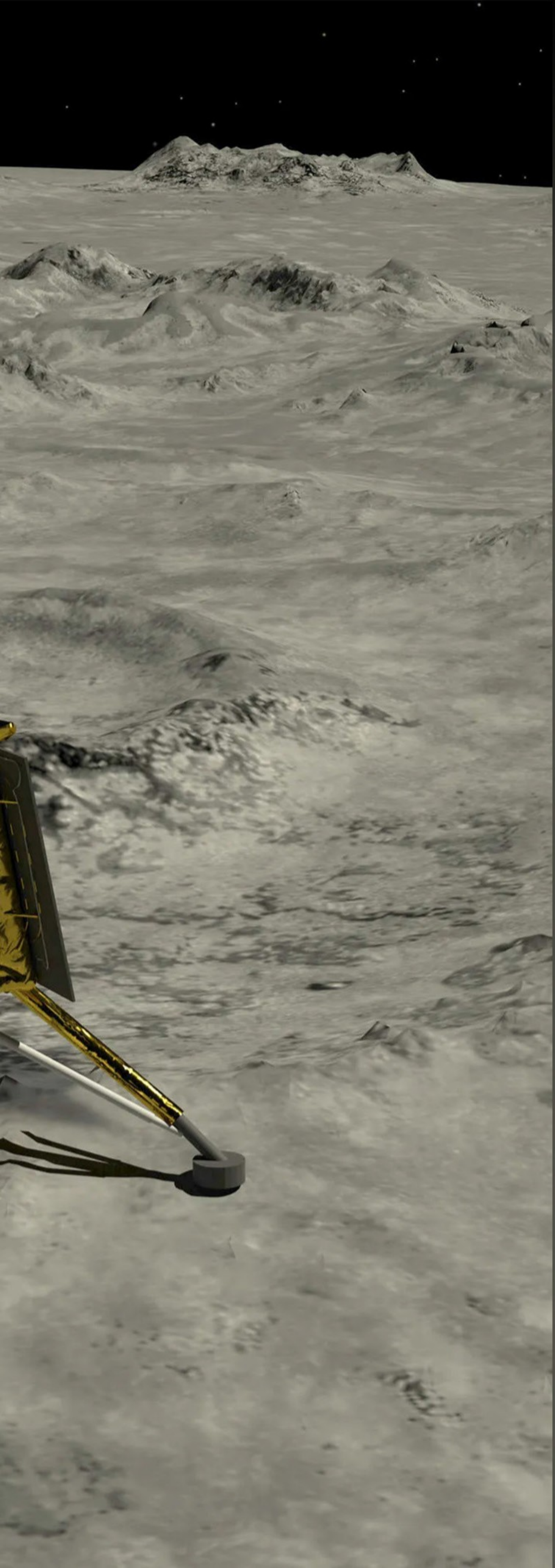
The rover also will study the moon's atmosphere and seismic activity, ISRO Chairman S. Somnath said.

The rover's route was reprogrammed when it came close to a 4-meter-wide (13-foot-wide) crater. "It's now safely heading on a new path," the ISRO said.

The craft moves at a slow speed of around 10 centimeters (4 inches) per second to minimize shock and damage to the vehicle from the moon's rough terrain.

After a failed attempt to land on the moon in 2019, India last week joined the United States,





the Soviet Union and China as only the fourth country to achieve this milestone.

The successful mission showcases India's rising standing as a technology and space powerhouse and dovetails with the image that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is trying to project: an ascendant country asserting its place among the global elite.

The mission began more than a month ago at an estimated cost of $75 million.

India's success came just days after Russia's Luna-25, which was aiming for the same lunar region, spun into an uncontrolled orbit and crashed. It would have been the first successful Russian lunar landing after a gap of 47 years. Russia's head of the state-controlled space corporation Roscosmos attributed the failure to the lack of expertise due to the long break in lunar research that followed the last Soviet mission to the moon in 1976.

Active since the 1960s, India has launched satellites for itself and other countries, and successfully put one in orbit around Mars in 2014. India is planning its first mission to the International Space Station next year, in collaboration with the United States.

Image: Nicolas Thomas

INDIA'S LUNAR ROVER KEEPS WALKING ON THE MOON, DAYS AFTER SPACECRAFT'S HISTORIC TOUCHDOWN

India’s lunar rover continued its walk on the moon after the historic touch-down of India’s spacecraft near the moon’s south pole last week, the country’s space agency said. The rover’s data collection and experiments could help determine if there is oxygen and hydrogen on the moon.

The Chandrayan-3 Rover is expected to conduct experiments over 14 days, including an analysis of the mineral composition of the lunar surface, the Indian Space Research Organization has said.

“The rover has successfully traversed a distance of about 8 meters (26.2 feet),” ISRO said. “All payloads on the propulsion module, lander module, and rover are performing nominally.”

The rover will also study the atmosphere of the moon and seismic activities, ISRO Chairman S. Somnath said.

“These experiments would pave the way for new scientific research about the availability of oxygen and hydrogen on the surface of the moon and can give us a direct or indirect answer as to whether there was life on the moon,” the Press Trust of India news agency cited India’s Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh as saying.

Pallava Bagla, a science writer and co-author of books on India’s space exploration, said the rover crawls, or moves at low speed, for safety reasons to minimizes shocks and damage to the vehicle on a rough surface and negotiating obstacles. It also has limited battery power.

Somnath said the lander had touched down close to the center of the 4.5-kilometer-wide (2.8-mile-wide) area that had been targeted for

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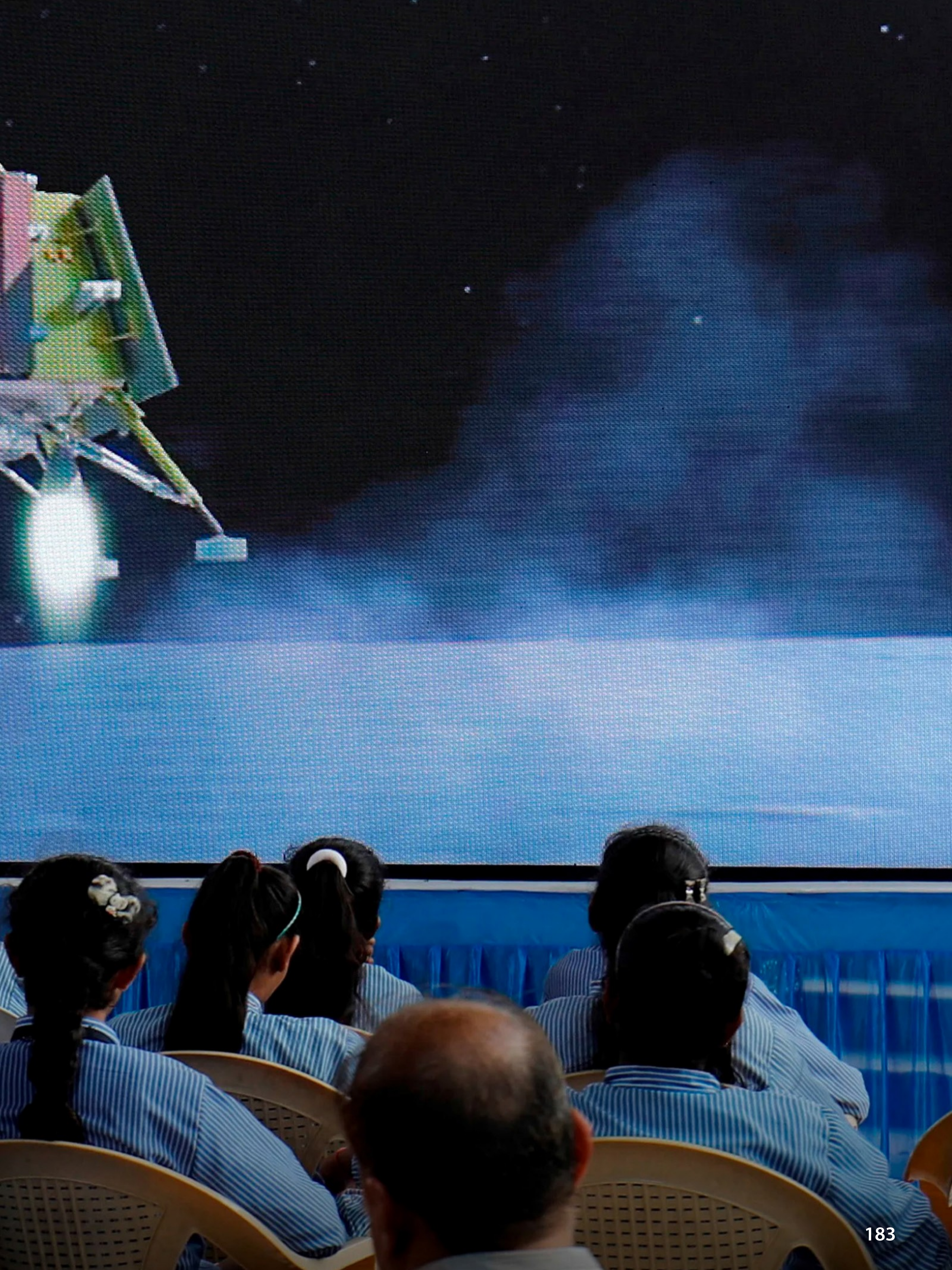
the landing. "It landed within 300 meters (985 feet) of that point."

After a failed attempt to land on the moon in 2019, India joined the United States, the Soviet Union and China as only the fourth country to achieve this milestone.

The successful mission showcases India's rising standing as a technology and space powerhouse and dovetails with the image that Prime Minister Narendra Modi is trying to project: an ascendant country asserting its place among the global elite.

The mission began more than a month ago at an estimated cost of $75 million. Somnath said that India would next attempt a manned lunar mission.



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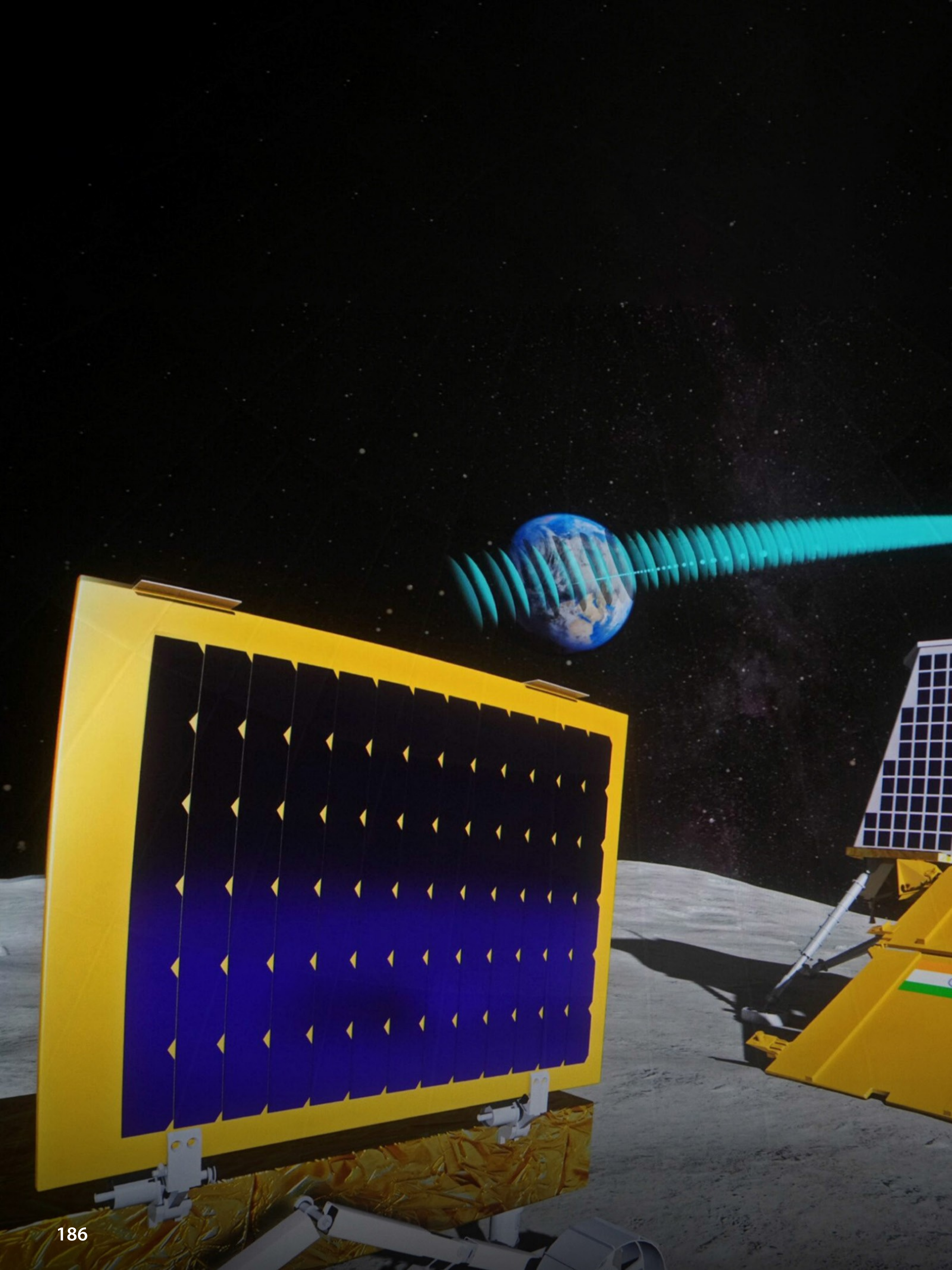


Many countries and private companies are interested in the moon's South Pole region because its permanently shadowed craters may hold frozen water that could help future astronaut missions, as a potential source of drinking water or to make rocket fuel.

India's success comes just days after Russia's Luna-25, which was aiming for the same lunar region, spun into an uncontrolled orbit and crashed. It would have been the first successful Russian lunar landing after a gap of 47 years. Russia's head of the state-controlled space corporation Roscosmos attributed the failure to the lack of expertise due to the long break in lunar research that followed the last Soviet mission to the moon in 1976.

Active since the 1960s, India has launched satellites for itself and other countries, and successfully put one in orbit around Mars in 2014. India is planning its first mission to the International Space Station next year, in collaboration with the United States.

DENZEL WASHINGTON'S VIGILANTE BATTLES THE ITALIAN MAFIA IN 'EQUALIZER 3'

There's an awful lot of talk about the end of movie stars considering Denzel Washington is right over here, walking around.

Antoine Fuqua's "Equalizer 3," a taut and textured sequel to Washington's vigilante series, isn't one of the actor's best films. It wouldn't crack his top 10. But it vividly encapsulates Washington's formidable on-screen potency.

You might think this would be in the movie's brutal action sequences, but no. It's the scenes of Washington fastidiously having a cup of tea at a sidewalk cafe or strolling the streets of a Sicilian town. This is a movie stitched together less by its plot mechanics than the pleasure of watching Denzel smirk, scowl and smile, in leisurely scenes mixed in with all the murder.

In that way, the "Equalizer" movies (the third of which is certainly the best of a so-so bunch), remind me of those great Walter Matthau thrillers like "Charley Varrick" and "Hopscotch" — movies about old men with expressive eyebrows who are set in their ways but have plenty of tricks left up their sleeve. (Washington, now 68, also took over Matthau's role in the remake of "Pelham One Two Three.")

There's no shortage these days of older stars plying their special sets of skills in action thrillers. Throw a stone in a movie theater and you're likely to hit (and risk drawing the lethal ire of) Liam Neeson, Harrison Ford or Tom Cruise. "Equalizer 3," an all-in-all good entry in the genre, is on the bloodier end of the spectrum.

Yet curiously neither the fight sequences (rapid and grotesque) nor the film's sense of suspense (perfunctory) are much of a selling point. The film, scripted by Richard Wenk, opens with a trail

The Equalizer 3 - Official Red Band Trailer

The Equalizer 3 – Franchise Recap

of bodies through the main house of an Sicily vineyard. In the wine cellar calmly sits Robert McCall (Washington), who shrugs, “Wouldn’t let me in, so...”

“The Equalizer” is loosely based on an 1980s TV series about a former intelligence service agent who spends his retirement bringing the scales of justice back in balance for regular folks he happens to encounter. And there’s a pleasantly episodic quality to the third film in the series.

A bullet in the back leaves McCall laid up in recovery after he’s taken in by a kindly village doctor named Enzo (Remo Girone). We’re in Southern Italy; most of the film was shot along the Amalfi coast, specifically the enchanting medieval fishing village of Atrani.

If there’s one truly implausible thing about “Equalizer 3,” it’s the fact that there isn’t a tourist in sight. McCall, who once out of bed strolls the village’s cobbled steps with a cane, seems to be the only American in town. He’s quickly charmed by the people who warmly welcome the “Americano.”

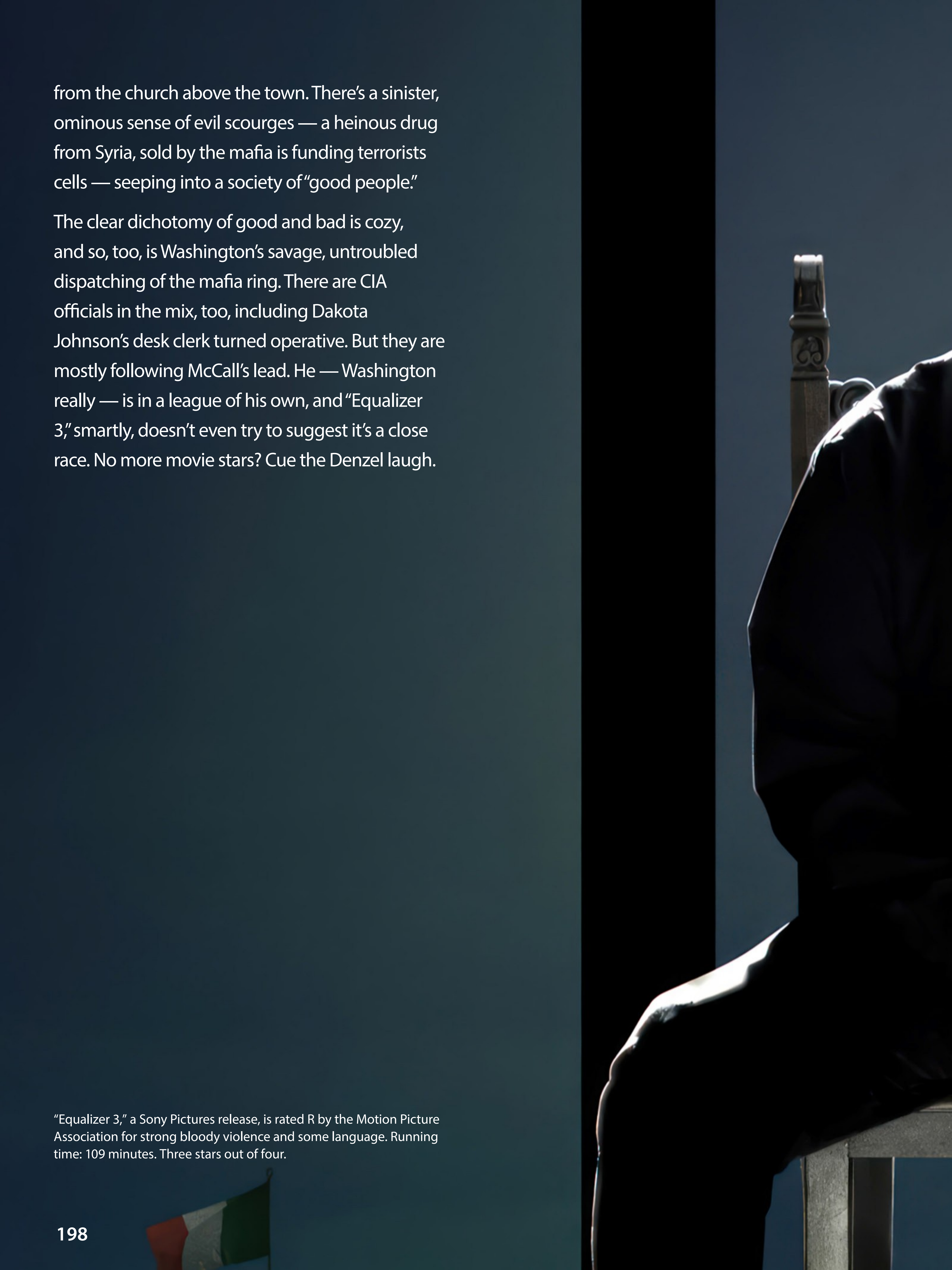
And the same time, the Camorra mafia is pushing harder into the village, with intentions of driving out locals to make room for hotels and casinos. They make a small army of designer-dressed, tattoo-covered thugs, and they descend on the village, unaware of the lurking elite vigilante quietly sipping tea across the street from their shakedowns or eating pasta at the next table.

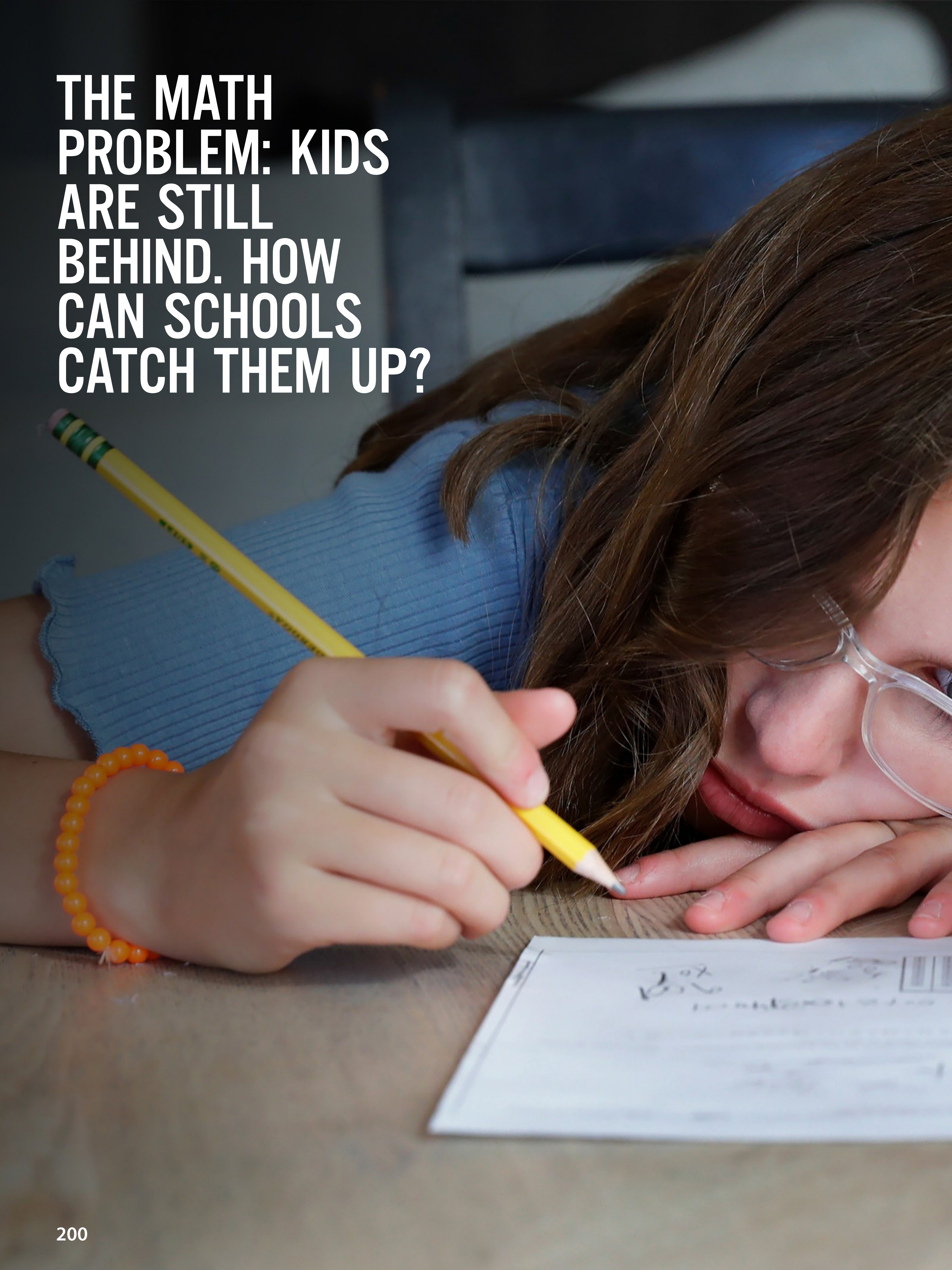
The well-traveled Fuqua, who helmed both prior “Equalizer” movies and first directed Washington in “Training Day,” is in his genre wheelhouse here. He trails McCall patiently and soaks up the local color, with a few touches of Christian imagery

from the church above the town. There's a sinister, ominous sense of evil scourges — a heinous drug from Syria, sold by the mafia is funding terrorists cells — seeping into a society of "good people."

The clear dichotomy of good and bad is cozy, and so, too, is Washington's savage, untroubled dispatching of the mafia ring. There are CIA officials in the mix, too, including Dakota Johnson's desk clerk turned operative. But they are mostly following McCall's lead. He — Washington really — is in a league of his own, and "Equalizer 3," smartly, doesn't even try to suggest it's a close race. No more movie stars? Cue the Denzel laugh.

"Equalizer 3," a Sony Pictures release, is rated R by the Motion Picture Association for strong bloody violence and some language. Running time: 109 minutes. Three stars out of four.





THE MATH PROBLEM: KIDS ARE STILL BEHIND. HOW CAN SCHOOLS CATCH THEM UP?

On a breezy July morning in South Seattle, a dozen elementary-aged students ran math relays behind an elementary school.

One by one, they raced to a table, where they scribbled answers to multiplication questions before sprinting back to high-five their teammate. These students are part of a summer program run by the nonprofit School Connect WA, designed to help them catch up on math and literacy skills lost during the pandemic. There are 25 students in the program, and all of them are one to three grades behind.

One 11-year-old boy couldn't do two-digit subtraction. Thanks to the program and his mother, who has helped him each night, he's caught up. Now, he says math is challenging, but he likes it.

Other kids haven't fared so well.

Across the country, schools are scrambling to catch up students in math as post-pandemic test scores reveal the depth of missing skills. On average, students' math knowledge is about half a school year behind where it should be, according to education analysts.

Children lost ground on reading tests, too, but the math declines were particularly striking. Experts say virtual learning complicated math instruction, making it tricky for teachers to guide students over a screen or spot weaknesses in problem-solving skills. Plus, parents were more likely to read with their children at home than practice math.

The result: Students' math skills plummeted across the board, exacerbating racial and socioeconomic inequities in math performance. And students aren't bouncing back as quickly as educators hoped, supercharging worries about how they will fare in high school and whether science, tech and medical fields will be available to them.

Students had been making incremental progress on national math tests since 1990. But over the past year, fourth and eighth grade math scores slipped to the lowest levels in about 20 years, according to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the "Nation's Report Card."

"It's a generation's worth of progress lost," said Andrew Ho, a professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

At Moultrie Middle School in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, Jennifer Matthews has seen the pandemic fallout in her eighth grade classes. Her students have shown indifference to understanding her pre-algebra and Algebra I lessons.

"They don't allow themselves to process the material. They don't allow themselves to think, 'This might take a day to understand or learn,'" she said.

And recently students have been coming to her classes with gaps in their understanding of math concepts. Basic fractions, for instance, continue to stump many of them, she said.

Using federal pandemic relief money, some schools have added tutors or piloted new curriculum approaches in the name of academic recovery. But that money has a looming expiration date: The September 2024 deadline for allocating funds will arrive before many children have caught up.

Like other districts across the country, Jefferson County Schools in Birmingham, Alabama, saw students' math skills take a nosedive from 2019 to 2021. Leveraging pandemic aid, the district placed math coaches in all of their middle schools.

The coaches help teachers learn new and better ways to teach students. About 1 in 5 public schools in the United States have a math coach, according to federal data. The efforts appear to be paying off: State testing shows math scores have started to inch back up for most of the Jefferson County middle schools.

In Pittsburgh's school system, which serves a student population that is 53% African American, special education teacher Ebonie Lamb said it's "emotionally exhausting" to see the inequities between student groups. But she believes those academic gaps can be closed through culturally relevant lessons, and targeting teaching to each student's skill level.

Lamb said she typically asks students to do a "walk a mile in my shoes" project in which they design shoes and describe their lives. It's a way she can learn more about them as individuals. Ultimately, those connections help on the academic front. Last year, she and a co-teacher taught math in a small group format that allowed students to master skills at their own pace.

"All students in the class cannot follow the same, scripted curriculum and be on the same problem all the time," she said.

Adding to the challenge of catching kids up is debate over how math should be taught. Over the years, experts say, the pendulum has swung between procedural learning, such as teaching kids to memorize how to solve problems step-by-step, and conceptual understanding, in which students grasp underlying math relationships.

"Stereotypically, math is that class that people don't like. ... For so many adults, math was taught just as memorization," said Kevin Dykema, president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. "When people start to understand what's going on, in whatever you're learning but especially in math, you develop a new appreciation for it."

Teaching math should not be an either-or situation, said Sarah Powell, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin who researches math instruction. A shift too far in the conceptual direction, she said, risks alienating students who haven't mastered the foundational skills.

"We actually do have to teach, and it is less sexy and it's not as interesting," she said.

In Spring, Texas, parent Aggie Gambino has often found herself searching YouTube for math videos. Giada, one of her twin 10-year-old daughters, has dyslexia and also struggles with math, especially word problems. Gambino says helping her daughter has proved challenging, given instructional approaches that differ from the way she was taught.

She wishes her daughter's school would send home information on how students are being taught.

"The more parents understand how they're being taught," she said, "the better participant they can be in their child's learning."

Even at a nationally recognized magnet school, the lingering impact of the pandemic on students' math skills is apparent. At the Townview School of Science and Engineering in Dallas, the incoming ninth graders in Lance Barasch's summer camp course needed to relearn the meaning of words like "term" and "coefficient."

"Then you can go back to what you're really trying to teach," he said.

Barasch wasn't surprised that the teens were missing some skills after their chaotic middle school years.

The hope is that by taking a step back, students can begin to move forward.

T-MOBILE WILL LAY OFF 5,000 EMPLOYEES, OR ABOUT 7% OF ITS WORKFORCE, IN THE COMING WEEKS

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Wireless carrier T-Mobile said it plans to cut 5,000 jobs, or about 7% of its workforce.

In email to employees shared in a regulatory filing, CEO Michael Sievert said the layoffs would come over the next five weeks and impact T-Mobile workers across the country — particularly those working in corporate and back-office roles, as well as some technology positions. Retail and customer service teams will not be part of the cuts.

"This is a large change, and an unusual one for our company," Sievert wrote. "Because of this, we do not envision making additional largescale reductions across the company again in the foreseeable future."

T-Mobile estimated it will book a pre-tax charge of about $450 million in the third quarter related to the job cuts. Laid-off employees will receive severance payments based on tenure, 60 days minimum of transition leave, career transition services and other benefits, the announcement said.

The layoffs at T-Mobile follow mass job cuts in the past year at a handful of companies — including Google, Meta, Amazon and Microsoft. Beyond the tech sector, layoffs have also hit Disney park employees, newspapers and some higher education jobs.

Sievert said the T-Mobile jobs impacted by the upcoming layoffs "are primarily duplicative to other roles" or may not fit with current changes and priorities at the company. He also pointed to rising costs of attracting and retaining customers.

The current restructuring is aimed at getting T-Mobile "efficiently focused on a finite set of winning strategies," Sievert added — later

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noting that the company needs "to move at the speed of technology," by using artificial intelligence and other tools to meet customer needs and stay competitive.

Last month, T-Mobile reported a second-quarter profit of $2.22 billion — up from a $108 million loss seen for the same period of 2022 — and posted total service revenues of $15.74 billion.

The Bellevue, Washington-based company became one of the country's largest cellphone service carriers in 2020 after buying rival Sprint, In May, T-Mobile also announced plans to acquire Mint Mobile, partly owned by actor Ryan Reynolds, in a cash-and-stock purchase of Ka'ena Corp. worth as much as $1.35 billion.

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